

Kenfig News



Aug 2007

Vol. 17 No. 4

Society Programme For Remainder of 2007-2008

Date	Event	Speaker
21st Aug 2007	No Meeting	
18th Sept 2007	Lotteries In History	Conall Boyle
16th Oct 2007	Members Evening	
20th Nov 2007	Global Warming Fact Or Fiction	Bruce Hawkins
18th Dec 2007	Christmas Dinner	Prince Of Wales
15th Jan 2008	Medieval Kenfig Beginnings	Barrie Griffiths
19th Feb 2008	The Acton Tin Huts	Keith Morgan
18th Mar 2008	To be arranged	
15th Apr 2008	A.G.M.	

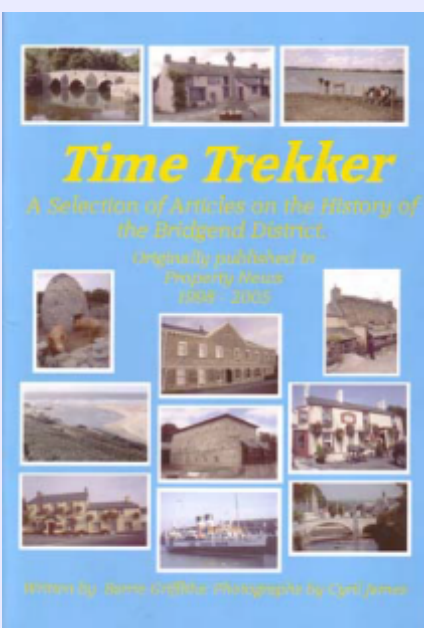
Society Visit To Pontypridd

For the June meeting the Society, about 40 members visited the Pontypridd Museum. As might have been expected this summer, it was wet, but we were able to take a walk in Ynysangharad Park and to see, amongst other items of interest, the memorial to James and Evan James, the father and son who were the composers of the words and of "Mae hen Wlad Fy Nhadau". We then visited the old stone bridge built in 1770 and which gave the town its original name of Newbridge, later changed to Pontypridd.

The museum is housed in a beautiful old church and contains a wealth of material of local historical interest. Although all the pews have been removed, the pulpit and the pipe organ remain and we were treated to a short recital on this instrument by one of the Society members. With a cup of tea to finish off the evening, all agreed that it was one of the best visits we had made.

Time Trekker - A New Society Booklet

In August, we will be publishing a new booklet written by Barrie Griffiths and called Time Trekker. Many members will remember a series of short articles under this title, written by Barrie and published in the weekly "Property News". The present book is a selection of the best of these.



This booklet is a departure for the Society, in that it covers stories about locations over the whole of Bridgend Borough and is illustrated with coloured illustrations, as well as black and white ones.

This move "up-market" has made it necessary to increase the price to £3.50. Society members however, enjoy a special price of £3.00.

The book will be on sale at the September meeting, so don't forget to bring some money with you!



Brian Davies Curator of Pontypridd Museum pointing out the memorial to Evan & James James in Ynysangharad Park, to Society members. Photo Barrie Griffiths.

Members' Evening

The October meeting will be a Members' Evening, Members are encouraged to make short contributions to the meetings on some aspect of local history. We thought this year that it would be a good idea if members could think about bringing some "artefact" to the meeting.

Such things as old photographs of people or places; old letters; programmes; newspaper cuttings; books; medals etc provide a focus for a short talk. So have a think about you've got and bring it along to the October meeting

Something To Contribute?

The Editor is always happy to receive contributions to the Newsletter. If you have any material suitable for inclusion or any queries about the Society. Terry Robbins on 01656 782351 or email - terryterry37@tiscali.co.uk.

For more information about the Society, visit our web site at www.kenfigsociety.supanet.com

Some Footprints from Long Long Ago

A first-hand account of the discovery of prehistoric footprints found on Sker Beach.

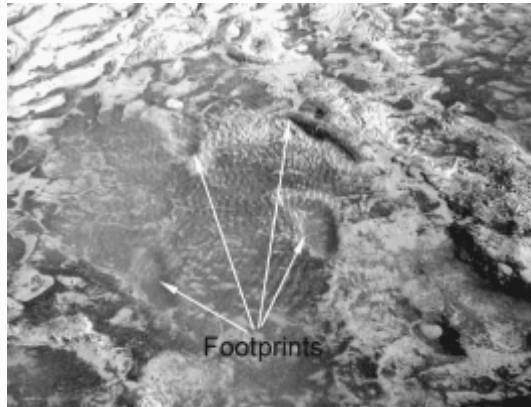
By John Blundell

The stretch of sand beach between Sker Point and the Kenfig River has always been of deep interest to me. Known variously as Sker Beach, or Kenfig Beach, depending most likely on the route used to reach it by the speaker, it has extensive sandy stretches where much of the sand is taken up into suspension on each tide in winter, a time of greater turbulence, in the sea water, only to drop out again on the ebb out beyond the surf zone. And so it travels west on the tide only to start rolling in again to the beach from about mid March onwards, in the calmer spring and summer conditions. Levels are at their highest at the end of October each year, and at their lowest in late winter. I have been walking there, or riding horses, each of the last 70 years or more, and so have had the opportunity regularly to observe just what goes on.

This last winter, due no doubt to global warming and a greater incidence and duration of gales, and so of turbulence, far greater areas of under-sand strata have come to light than I have ever seen in a long life. This exposes rock and other debris and peat beds formed under fresh water conditions when sea levels were much lower millennia ago. There is evidence of one or more interruptions in the peat growth because of less benign conditions. The plants concerned, killed off by changes in temperature or of rainfall, or possibly excess salt spray in the wind, leading to stratification. So tidal action can peel off the top layer of peat, exposing the earlier layers beneath. One winter in 1938 my late father and I were down there looking at some peat beds together, and he was explaining to me what fascinating areas these peat beds are, and how much they can tell us about prehistoric conditions. Of course modern pollen analysis can tell us even more. He served on the Council of the National Museum and was always interesting to listen to on all aspects of the natural world about us. He explained to me that he had found deer antlers in the peat and also flint arrow heads, and about sunken forests, glacial debris brought south, pebbles, gravel and larger boulders, by the melting ice that covered Britain long ago. There are still oak tree stumps and fallen boughs here and there in the peat, proof of an oak forest and associated undergrowth, growing there at one time in the eastern sector of what is now Swansea Bay. Deer, cattle and horses, obvious prey for prehistoric hunter gatherers, had much to browse on. The first two left lots of footprints behind to tell us they had been there as well. Their young, easy prey, provided tender meat for the whole family to come on the menu all those years ago.

By mid-January the vast new areas of peat, blue clay and pebbles exposed as the sand departed, started to be of much interest. I rang a neighbour, Steve Maitland Thomas to ask him if he would come with me to take a look. We were down there together on January 19th for some hours in a brisk, cold wind. All of a sudden we started to see a series of barefoot human footprints in one of the lower, older peat deposits, where the later layer of peat over it had peeled away exposing the layer below. There were adult prints and those, half size, of a child, at

least 8 or 10 of them. It was cold and the tide was coming in. We took some photos, assessed just where we were, in order to return, and left for home. The Museum staff were informed and so, a few days later we met Dr. Edith Evans from the Glamorgan Gwent Archaeological Trust who brought a colleague from the Museum with her, and we took them straight to the location concerned. On the way I was chatting to them about other footprints we had seen on earlier occasions. Cattle prints, deer prints in large numbers, and some deer antlers had been found in the peat and we talked of how all that told us something about prehistoric conditions there. They soon confirmed not only that the prints were indeed prehistoric, they found some more that we had missed, and a few deer prints as well. They measured these prints, photographed them and used a position fixing instrument to pin-point the position on the map.



Above & below - Pictures of the Sker footprints taken by Steve Maitland-Thomas



Subsequently Dr. Silvia Gonzales from John Moores University in Lancashire, who has specialised in prehistoric human footprints, visited the site. She brought electronic three-dimensional scanning equipment and a generator to power it, in order to produce three-dimensional images for laboratory study out of the wind and weather. She told us that these human footprint sites, mostly on coasts or estuaries are rare. There are a few in Britain and only 55 world-wide, so ours was number 56!

She pointed out that the youngster was female, as the spread of toes is different in the two genders, when growing up, and she was running and jumping about as children do. My own deduction was that this was a hunting trip, since all the prints were heading west, or I nearly so, into the prevailing wind, something early man would have known well, if he were to keep his family fed. All the undergrowth of bushes and brambles would have provided good cover, to bring a close encounter when stalking prey.

By the middle of March a new protective cover of sand had started to arrive, and by the end of the month all these human tracks were again covered up. We know a good deal

about the animals that prehistoric man hunted from the bone remains found in the caves in Gower. The chapter on mammals, past and present, in the Natural History volume of Glamorgan County History, printed in 1936, is most informative. Most bones were split open to extract the marrow, and included mammoth, red deer, horse and cattle, all killed, and eaten. There are Roman records of wild boar about in the woodlands around two millennia ago, so they must have been there long before that together with red squirrels and hares, and other snacks such as moles or hedgehogs. The hunter gatherer and his family had abundant fish and shell-fish, and when in season there were berries and nuts to gather; seakale perhaps and other nourishing vegetable plants, the wild ancestors, many of them, of some of the vegetables we enjoy today.

I will not easily forget my late father's comment to me that day on the beach in 1938, when I was 15; "Keep your eyes open John at these peat beds; in the years ahead you never know what you may find." Prophetic words, indeed!