

Cymdeithas Hanesyddol Tyddewi a Phebbidiog St Davids and Dewisland Historical Society

The Life of an Auctioneer Edward Perkins

The location for the Christmas Dinner was most appropriate for an auctioneer as the venue was formerly a double-cowshed! Auctioneering has a long history of being the best way of finding a price for goods and grew in the C17th with the successes of the East India Company -when their ships returned to Britain bringing cargoes stored in the Company's warehouses and then auctioned off to get the highest possible profits! Merchants would gather in the new Coffee Houses (such as Mincing Lane, London) to discuss trade in the latest goods and prices and this developed into the opportunity for buying and selling properties.



In the mid to late C19th Jack (John) Francis established his auctioneer business in Carmarthen – eventually being succeeded by his sons. **David Perkins** became an apprentice in the business. In the 1920s, in the depths of the Depression, the auctioneers became involved with the Agriculture Mortgage Association and files from these days provide a complete social history of the farming communities across much of South Wales. The Francis Auctioneers became the largest livestock auctioneers in the area and with the establishment of the Milk Marketing Board, in 1933, the industry boomed. With the MMB auctioneers contributed to the eradication of TB by the 1940s so buyers came to buy the TB-free livestock, from across England and Europe. David Perkins oversaw dozens of sales over his career - originally many of these were conducted on the farm but the vendors often had to wait 6 months until pay-day. When in 1893 Penlan bailiffs auctioned the property and it was bought by the **Beynon** family and they remained there until 2005 when Edward Perkins himself auctioned the herd of Welsh Blacks for **John Beynon** when he left Penlan - on exactly the same date.

Edward Perkins began work as an auctioneer in the 1960s – a very busy time as animal health became a priority and vets, farming unions and auctioneers all united to support farmers. They were so successful in the following 5 years that cattle were even being bought and shipped to France in the 1970s. The introduction of Milk Quotas in 1984 caused uproar but achieved what it was designed to do – limit milk over-production. The 1980s saw the outbreak of BSE and the destruction of thousands of cattle and the ban on movement of livestock so auctioneers could not conduct business. With the creation of the Confederation of British Agriculture in 2002 all the interested parties have again come together to share ideas for promoting British agriculture across Europe

The greatest change from an auctioneer's perspective has been the value of agricultural land. In 1907 land (Picton Estate) was sold for £30 per acre – over double of a few years earlier. By 1969 the prices had risen to £300 p.a. (Church Farm, Burton) and by 1974 reached £1,000 p.a.! The 1980s saw values fall but by the end of the decade it rose again to £1,500 p.a. and remained fairly stable through the 1990s. Prices rises were driven by people moving into South Wales from other areas where the



land values had driven farmers out. By 2008 prices reached £5,000 p.a. and continued to rise to the current highs of £12-14,000 (particularly reflecting agri-businesses swamping the small farms). In Pembrokeshire with the outbreak of Bovine TB not only are buyers from England not coming to the auctions to buy the livestock but they are reluctant to buy the land – in case of the risk to their own pedigree herds should they bring them to graze on these pastures.

As for the potential impact of Brexit - it is anybody's guess ... and people will not invest in land or livestock if they cannot see any potential for getting a return for their money.