

Llangwm Heritage Project – Or – The Flemings are Coming!

It started with a bid to save a treasured church from falling into complete decay and ended with finding descendants of the effigies in the church still living in the parish – as well as restoring the (C13th?) church of St Jerome to the heart of the community! What more could anyone ask for? With the help of the Heritage Lottery Fund, as well as many other generous and helpful bodies, not only has the physical fabric of the church been restored, in a way that will secure its history for a few more centuries, but the history of the community itself has been unearthed – both figuratively and literally!



Intensive research – particularly of some of the existing primary sources (requiring a spot of Medieval Latin!) has allowed for the Family Tree of the prominent De La Roche Family (same family that built Roche Castle) to be traced back, in Llangwm, to Godbert 'The Fleming' in 1096. Whilst Godbert himself is known to have been born in Pembroke Castle (when it was probably little more than a timber palisade) his father or grandfather must have arrived in 1066 as one of William the Conqueror's Flemish mercenaries. It seems by the time of Henry I the king found himself with vast numbers of these Flemish mercenaries and the easiest thing to do with them was to shunt them off to the farthest flung reaches of the 'empire' - in Wales. They gained land and prestige and Godbert's own sons went on to spread even further west – into Ireland.



During the 'remodelling' of the church there was the opportunity to use GPR (ground penetrating radar) to explore the archaeology not only beneath the floor of the church (to find earlier structures) but also at the location of Great Nash Farm, where work was done to try to excavate the remains of the manor house. Large numbers of the local community – as well as local school children – were involved and helped expose medieval walls and pottery (unfortunately no distinctive Flemish-wares) but Mesolithic flints too!

One of the most remarkable outcomes was that of the DNA project where it was possible to prove that there are still descendants of the De La Roche family living in the village so the Flemings are still alive and well in Llangwm – thank you very much!

The outcome of all the intensive – and extensive – research that has been going on alongside the work on the church is to be a series of six tapestries, designed with the help of children in local schools, to mark the key episodes in the history of the De La Roche family and the Flemings of Llangwm. Each tapestry will be accompanied by an 'App' so visitors to the church can appreciate the amazing history of the village. Materials that cannot fit alongside the tapestries will be available as a DVD of the 'Little Flanders' that is Llangwm!

It is hoped that next year the St Davids Historical Society will be able to make this their destination for one of the programme of Summer Visits!