

Cymdeithas Hanesyddol Tyddewi a Phebidiog St Davids and Dewisland Historical Society

Rediscovered Treasures – from the Archives of the Historical Society

Paul Edey

Having at last managed to locate and access the drive of one of the Society's old computers a number of real gems have come to light and need to be shared to help appreciate a simpler way-of-life!



Some of these images were seen in the exhibition a decade or so ago but they give a glimpse into the way people enjoyed the simple pleasures that the area around St Davids had to offer. Although people had little time for leisure activities, and only the wealthier could automobiles, they clearly donned their Sunday Best and made the most of their free time. Hundreds of people would attend the Sunday School Outings and record these with photographic evidence – whilst amongst the affluent were some who photographed their family fun at every possible occasion! The young man appears to be wearing his beau's fetching

bathing cap whilst she favours her 'Eliza Doolittle' model!

One of the most remarkable 'Characters' of St Davids was '**Dai the Mill**'. Serving around the world in the Merchant Navy – in clippers then steamers – Dai became a very talented electrical and mechanical engineer and could turn his hand to repairing, adapting or making all manner of items (as well as being a talented musician). On his return to St Davids when not milling he planted withy-beds to provide the willow withies to weave his own lobster pots. He was so adept that he could weave a lobster pot in an hour and would take his boat out daily in order to set his dozen lobster pots. Whilst many pots were lost off shore to rough weather they would last him 2 seasons. In addition to keeping his own boat in Porthclais (then St Justinians – and rowed visitors round Ramsey Island for 7s 6d a time) he served as Coxswain of the St Davids Lifeboat.



DAI MAKING LOBSTER POT



The Mauretania & Fishguard

SS Mauretania ('Steam Ship' later RMS 'Royal Mail Steamer'), off Fishguard in 1909, she held the Blue Riband of the North Atlantic in 1907 for the fastest crossing – and held it for 20 years. As the stop at Fishguard meant a 10 hour saving against Liverpool, and 14 hours against Southampton the Mauretania Mole Breakwater was constructed to allow the vast ship to enter the harbour to unload post and passengers. Unfortunately rather than allowing large ships to dock this led to increased silting of the harbour and everyone/thing had to be 'tendered' between ship and shore. Fishguard for a

time it figured as an important trans-continental port, when the Cunard liners from America were calling there to set down passengers and mails for London and the Continent (the Cunard Express – the Great express made the 145¼ miles from Cardiff to London at an average speed of over 60 miles an hour). The Southampton route finally won out making possible a direct Continental link to Cherbourg which saw the decline of Fishguard as well as the difficulties in providing the 'infra-structure' necessary for a port the size ships like the Mauretania demanded. Though by 1910 in addition to the dockside at Goodwick there were also extensive Harbour railways and sidings along the Parrog, along with links with the North Pembrokeshire Railway (which included the Maenchlochog and Rosebush Railway, used for moving stone from quarries but many of the routes proved uneconomic – gradients being too steep).

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The St Davids Gas Works was established in the 1880s, and remained working until the 1950s. Now NT Land, and the only remains of the buildings is the refreshment kiosk which was the original pumping station (and, as a listed building, retains the equipment under the counter!) The old Porth Clais harbour wall is recorded as 12th century, but there are claims it was built by the Romans. DW James reports the first trade record as 1385, but probably was used as a harbour from the earliest times that man lived on the peninsula - as Pilgrims are known to have arrived and left via this route. The well where St David was baptised - the site of Capel-y-Pistyll - has now been restored (with the help of Carole Lloyd), and was finally listed by CADW in 2017.

Porthgain St Brides Quarry was the original quarry, followed by Pennsylvania, and was operated by inclines and briefly Blondin ropeways up and down to the harbour. Later a tunnel ran straight through to the harbour, emerging near the Eastern ore chutes. Originally poorer quality slate was quarried then replaced by more commercial road-stone. The engine shed, weighbridge and water facilities were located here, probably a little more sheltered than at Pen Clegyr. In addition the harbour provided facilities for exporting the Aberiddy slate and, as with Porth Gain, loaded wagons were hauled from the granite quarry to the crushing plant (originally by horse then later by small steam or traction engines) including wagons brought originally from the Aberiddy slate quarry.



Penberry Quarry

Because of the abundance of easily accessible building stone Pembrokeshire has abundant small quarries - such as Penberry Quarry. This quarry provided employment for a workforce of at least 20 men, quarrying, shaping and transporting the stone, and it continued to provide building stone into the 1960s.

The Bullnose/Bullseye Morris

... with a powerful Hotchkiss engine (a French company, who started making armaments, engine components, the complete engines and finally cars. High quality, powerful machines. Production stopped in 1955). Researches suggest this may be Dr. Williams - looking like a professional man - he would have been one of the few residents of St Davids to need a car in the line of his work. If it is - he is supposed to have had a number of incidents ... having run over a number of ducks - and even a pig - as a result of the power of the engine!

Photograph courtesy of Jane Davis

