

# Cymdeithas Hanesyddol Tyddewi a Phebbidiog St Davids and Dewisland Historical Society

## Solva 100 Years Ago Grace Davies

Solva at the end of World War 1 was a very different place from the present. Not only were there far fewer properties but – as with most settlements of the time – it was largely self-sufficient. Although by the early 1900s it had ceased to handle cargoes of coal, lime, timber, wheat and many other imported goods ... it supported a range of thriving businesses.

Solva Mill was located by the bridge, with its row of mill-workers cottages, whilst Middle Middle boasted a further 2 mills – the woollen-mill and a furze-mill (where gorse was collected from the common land and then crushed for fodder for livestock). In the 1891 Census the Mill House was



occupied by William Howells, Labourer, whilst next door in Bridge House was Henry Jenkins Blacksmith and Jane Propert lived in Ty Mawr. In Stella House is a 'Light Keeper's Wife' whilst the inhabitants of Goat Street include 3 Agricultural Labourers, 2 Washer-women, a Milliner, a General Servant and a 'Rural Postman'. By the bridge is the "Cambrian" Hotel (Caroline Pritchard, Widow, Licensed Victualler) whilst towards the harbour are the "Ship" Hotel (Henry Davies, 22, Licensed Victualler) and – next-door but one - the "Mariner's" Hotel (Thomas Davies, 71, Licensed Victualler). Harbour House is home to Martha Whiteside Williams (Widow, 69) 'Retired Proprietress of Printing Office' and James *Bownell*(?), Schoolmaster, lived in Moelgrove House (which may have been the house set up as an Academy for young boys to be trained in basic skills before they went to sea). On High Street lived Francis John (Grocer), George *Prence*? (Postmaster) and Sampson Williams (Farmer and General Merchant). Samson Williams owned a number of lime kilns and when they became uneconomic he ordered their demolition and then donated the land for the building of the Calvinistic Chapel (now Raul Speek's gallery). The story goes that he then had a falling out with the chapel elders and rode his horse to St David for Sunday services! Another inhabitant of High Street was Caleb Rees (Tailor and Photographer), whose house now forms part of the 'Old Pharmacy'. Crowded along the road from the harbour were also a number of storehouses for the goods brought by the ships plying their trade around the coast.

In the 1891 Census the Baptist Chapel, the Independent Chapel, the Wesleyan Chapel and St Aidan's Church as well as the Schoolroom and the Free Reading Room ... and the Police Station. According to an early Guide Book Solva's businesses included: 3 Bakers, 2 Blacksmiths, 16 or so 'Boarding Houses', Boot & Shoe Makers, Builders & Carpenters, 2 Butchers, 8 Boatmen, 3 Coal Merchants, 5 Drapers, 8 Dressmakers and 1 Milliner. Mr Lloyd's Pharmacy also housed the Post Office (Mrs Lloyd Postmistress) and there was also a Doctor and Dentist. The Banks 'came to visit' once or twice a week – with different banks coming on different days. B.J.Lewis's Cash Stores – Grocer, Draper and Iron-monger (amongst other things) occupied the former warehouse - now Window-on-Wales.



Some of the 'Characters' of Old Solva included Thomas Gibbons (the Story-teller), John Callaghan (who plied his team of donkeys bringing in 'small-coal' to mix with clay to form culm for fuel), James Davies (Master Carpenter/Wheel-wright – who worked as far afield as Swansea!), H W Evans (J.P. of Harbour House – as well known Naturalist and Taxidermist) and Jack Nicholas (keen promoter of the choir).