
CAERWENT HISTORIC TRVST

We have had a quite eventful summer, as much as history can continue to be eventful! The autumn may be less so as I am finding it difficult to rely on myself for the detailed organisation of our events and I would welcome someone else taking on the job.

Cadw laid on three whole days at the end of July and we enjoyed an evening at the Parish Church learning about the renovated organ. We were pleased to see many of you at the Show, and to accept the substantial cheque from Liz and Dilys who have passed on to us the residual funds of the Caerwent Community History Association. The following day we finished our exploration of the Neddern valley: Dennis Manning took us to a vantage point near Caldicot Castle from where we could see the sweep of the ancient Llyn Liwan as it curved round towards Caerwent Brook. It was not too difficult to imagine boats coming up, or even the tide coming in. We then followed the low land down to the site of "Harold's Hunting Lodge" at Portskewett, which the Time Team identified two years ago as having direct access to the sea. What they thought the remains of a fishpond seems to us the original harbour *Porth Iscoed*.

We also continue to enjoy contacts which throw light on the past, such as this report from the Bristol Mercury and Daily Post dated Thursday 27th July 1882:

MARRIAGE FESTIVITIES AT CAERWENT – Yesterday the usually quiet village of Caerwent was full of bustle and excitement from "early morn", the occasion being the marriage at the village church of Miss Annie S. Woodall, second daughter of Mr. Thomas Woodall, of Great Dinham, to Mr. James Alfred Bevan, of Clifton. The party were conveyed from Dinham to Caerwent in five carriages and pairs, and they passed on their route under several large triumphal arches, which had been erected by the villagers and other cottages at Crick and elsewhere, the Woodall family being very popular in the neighbourhood. Shortly after 11 o'clock the party entered the church, the bride being accompanied by her father and her bridesmaids, who were Miss Jones, Miss Bevan, and the Misses Woodall. The officiating clergymen were the Rev Macdonald Steel, the rector, assisted by Revs H Forster, and T.J. Woodall, brother of the bride. The party returned to Dinham, where the wedding breakfast was served to about 40 persons. Later in the day the happy pair left for the Lake district. As the happy pair quitted the village showers of rice were thrown after them.

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This vignette of local life has come to light through surviving relatives based in Wiltshire visiting Caerwent Church. This reminds us that there never was a direct road between Dinham and Caerwent. From the information they have supplied I have picked out the following points which particularly interest me:

- The lavish celebration plus the fact that the bridegroom was quite a catch indicate that Dinham was a socially prestigious place only 130 years ago. Presumably the Woodalls lived at the Manor House, unceremoniously demolished in 1943, of which we know very little.
- The couple returned to Caerwent Church in 1890 to baptise a daughter, by which time James was ordained and baptised her himself.
- James was a distinguished sportsman and was the Captain of the very first Welsh rugby team in 19th Feb 1881. Wales played against England on a field at Blackheath. Unfortunately Wales lost heavily, but it was a start!