

## **Swansea : the little town by the Tawe – *Gerald Gabb* (February 2019)**

We were very pleased to welcome Gerald to the February meeting and to have what was probably a preview of just a very few of the fascinating nuggets of historical information that will be found in the second volume (in 3 parts) of his monumental history of the town which is due to be published shortly.

Gerald started with a painting of a house in the town in the 18th century with a stack of pottery in front of it which prompted the question, where did this and all the other 'stuff' in pre-industrial Swansea come from? Pottery from France has been found in a medieval context and in the 17th century much of it came from south-west England. But then in the 18th century locally produced pottery appears. But in the 19th century local ware was replaced by pottery from many different parts. It was the same with other items: weavers, tailors, hatters and cutlers were all found in the town but in the 19th century their local products were replaced by imports from many different sources.

Another example was provided by an 18th-century anchormith: as well as making anchors he carried out a whole range of smithing work. But this trade changed too: in the 19th century the role of the smith became confined to farriery and nearly all the metal work that the town required was imported, in many cases from Birmingham. This transition from self-sufficiency could be shown to result from the activities of merchants such as the Quaker, William Padley, who developed an extensive international trade and held all manner of materials in his warehouse.

Gerald then took as the framework around which to build his re-creation of the town and its (mainly) 18th-century inhabitants, a document describing a dispute between Dr John Lane of the Llangyvelach copperworks and his manager, John Phillips. Phillips had selected the site of the copperworks and had supervised construction but then relations fell apart and accusations were flung at him. The alleged misdeeds of Phillips led the speaker into a wonderfully discursive survey of some of the personalities and places of the town. There was the Starr Inn, where Phillips lived and which survived long enough to be photographed in the 19th century.

There was James Griffiths who was one of the founders of the Cambrian copperworks and who lived in an impressive house right up against the ruins of the castle. He also leased the castle from the Corporation, probably for storage space, since he was another of the merchants who imported goods into Swansea. As might be expected in a harbour town, Swansea had a number of rope walks and it is possible to see how they influenced the later layout of streets in the town. The line of one of these rope walks may have resulted in Oxford Street. Calvert Richard Jones II laid out this street and others around it and provided the ground on which Swansea market is built.

Until 1851 there was no bridge across the Tawe below Morriston. It was in the interests of the merchants, who controlled the Corporation, not to have a bridge across the mouth of the river since it might have interfered with the shipping on which they depended. Instead there was a ferry boat across and ferry houses on either side of the passage. The last of these, latterly the Beaufort Arms public house survived into the 1940s, albeit in a very run-down and dilapidated state.

The market provided by Calvert Richard Jones in 1830 was preceded by an earlier market hall at the top of Wind Street. The speaker examined John Nixon's 1799 lithograph of this market which depicted in caricature (not always unfriendly) individuals who may have been actual townspeople of the time. What it also shows is an awareness of fashionable dress, an increasing sophistication and the beginnings of a middle class.

Nearby was the Strand, still an open area along side the river bank, but starting to become built up with good quality houses which later were replaced by warehouses. Tallow chandlers could be found in this area. One of them, Thomas Walters, lived in Island House, now demolished but one standing in the middle of the road at the top of Wind Street. He gave his name to the slightly later development of Walter Road.

Gerald apologised for not including much industrial history in his talk, but in fact it contained a great deal. Industry is not confined to heavy industry, even though that was soon to become the direction that Swansea chose to take.

P.R.R.