



# LLANTRISANT TOWN TRUST FREEMEN'S NEWSLETTER

DECEMBER 2020

No. 40



## **FREEMEN DEMAND HIGHWAY MEASURES AS MORE GRAZING ANIMALS INJURED**

**Llantrisant Town Trust continues its 40-year battle for traffic calming measures on Llantrisant Common as more grazing animals are killed or injured.**

Over the last 20 years, 56 large animals have been killed or severely injured in collisions with vehicles. Around 15 vehicle-only accidents on the common not all of which were reported to the police.

With the growth of Llantrisant Business Park and the opening of the Royal Glamorgan Hospital, motorists are using the Common and the old town as a convenient thoroughfare, causing danger to pedestrians and animals alike. This is down to sheer traffic volume and speed.

The effect of these accidents on the rights and traditions of the Freeman are twofold. First, some Freeman graziers, are deterred from placing livestock on the Common which could cause long-term problems for the land.

Second, the reduction in grazing is leading to the encroachment of woody shrub species.

Due to the nature of grazing cattle and horses – but not sheep – a unique fauna and flora has developed on the 290-acre Common as recognised by Natural Resources Wales who have given it a Site of Special Scientific Interest status.

Traffic issues could threaten the SSSI status of the land. Without grazing this much-loved Common could return to its woodland state. Rhondda Cynon Taf Council has agreed to a 30mph speed limit reduction on the Common but trustees fear this will not resolve an issue which could potentially damage the Freeman's unique land and heritage.

## **CLERK'S REPORT**

Nobody could have predicted the unprecedented events of 2020 due to the Coronavirus pandemic and how it challenged the lives of each and every one of us.

The human cost of the virus has been unfathomable, with Freeman and their families suffering personal losses.

As a community Llantrisant rallied around and supported one another in very many ways.

Llantrisant Town Trust continued to operate under the difficult circumstances, although our plans were greatly delayed or reduced due to three subsequent lockdown periods.

For the first time in two centuries the annual Court Leet Ceremony and Dinner did not take place. Our AGM was also rescheduled and annual events such as The Big Picnic, Medieval Fayre and Christmas at the Castle were postponed.

Just seven months after re-opening the restored Llantrisant Guildhall Heritage and Visitors' Centre – The Home of the Freeman – we were forced to close its doors to the general public.

We all hope that 2021 will bring a new normality to all of our lives and will allow us to meet once more to celebrate our rich heritage and traditions.

Here's wishing you a very Happy and a Healthy New Year.

Dean Powell

## FREEMAN FOCUS

**Alabama Rot:** In February four dogs suffered lesions and renal failure after walking the Common. One of the dogs died and a post-mortem revealed he had suffered with Alabama Rot. The Clerk corresponded with the veterinary surgeon, Natural Resources Wales and RCT Council's Environmental Health Dept. Warning signs for dog owners were installed on the Common entrances.

**Welsh Water:** Emergency work has been carried out twice on the Common by Welsh Water. Compensation claims have been made to the Town Trust for the work.

**Common Overseers:** Following more than four decades of faithful and dedicated service, Freeman Henry Alexander retired as Overseer of Llantrisant Common. The work has now been taken up by Freeman David John and Trustee Huw Rees. Once again we'd like to thank Henry for his tireless service over so many years.

**Buzzing About:** During the summer Buglife carried out a survey of small scabious bees on Llantrisant Common as part of a Wales-wide report on the species.

## BUTTERFLY CONSERVATION

**A new project by the Initiative for Nature Conservation Cymru (INCC) aims to prevent the extinction of the rare Marsh Fritillary butterfly on Llantrisant Common.**

The first of its kind project will rear a small number of caterpillars so that thousands of butterflies can be released back into the local landscape.



Several local extinctions of the Marsh Fritillary have already taken place across Wales, and many more populations teeter on the brink of survival. The butterfly depends on a network of suitable marshy grassland habitat with a plentiful supply of the caterpillar's food plant Devil's-bit Scabious. These marshy grassland habitats are best managed by cattle as they create the ideal conditions for the caterpillar as well as a plentiful supply of nectar rich wildflowers for the adult butterflies to feed on.

The loss of suitable habitat in the past has meant that the butterfly's population has declined to such an extent that it is now only found at just a handful of sites in the landscape.

In recent years, a partnership of Llantrisant Town Trust, graziers and conservationists has gone to great lengths to restore the Marsh Fritillary's habitat.

INCC are aiming to raise an initial £60,000 to help cover the costs of this eight year project and to make the population reinforcement a real success.

## COMMON'S MANAGEMENT PLAN



Llantrisant Town Trust and Natural Resources Wales is about to enter a new 5-Year Management Plan Agreement to enhance and preserve Llantrisant Common. The plan supports the land's status as a Site of Special Scientific Interest by encouraging more grazing to take place and the

development of native plant life and species. Freeman John Jeremy has led the negotiations with Nick Sharp of Natural Resources Wales.

The Trust will receive support for the maintenance of the Common dependent on sufficient grazing taking place on the land. They will also be able to assist with any costs involved in the removal of cattle for TB testing.

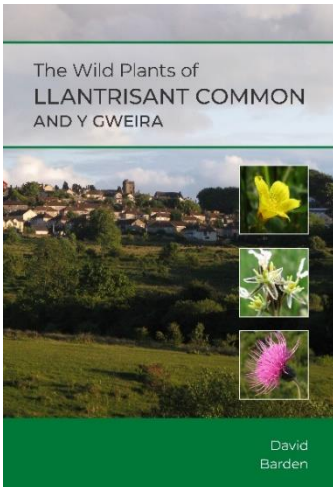
Discussions are ongoing to finalise the agreement which will be brought before Trustees in early 2021.



# COMMON PLANTLIFE CELEBRATED

Llantrisant resident David Barden has published a book devoted to the town's best-loved landscape.

For well over 600 years, cattle and horses have roamed over the common land immediately north of the ancient hilltop settlement of Llantrisant in



South Wales.

This long history of grazing, together with continued stewardship by generations of the town's Freeman, has resulted in the survival of a rich array of flowering plants and ferns, as well as other wildlife.

In this book, David Barden celebrates this diversity by describing the result of a nine-year study of the wild plants of Llantrisant Common and the adjoining Wildlife Trust nature reserve of Y Gweira. Detailed information about the preferred habitats and distributions of the plants are combined with identification tips, over 350 photographs, and historical notes drawn from

local sources and residents' memories.

The result is an in-depth portrait of a beautiful and fascinating place that is both a valuable wildlife site (recognised as a SSSI) and a cherished open space for many Llantrisant residents.

"The Wild Plants of Llantrisant Common and Y Gweira" is priced £12.50.

To order your copy email David Barden at [dbarden77@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:dbarden77@yahoo.co.uk).

## HEALTHY HILLSIDES PROJECT

The Wildlife Trust of South and West Wales has partnered up with local organisations to support local wildlife and reduce wildfires.

Llantrisant's Graig mountain, owned by the Freeman, has been earmarked as one of the prime locations to be protected and enhanced by the scheme.

The Healthy Hillside Project is a partnership between numerous organisations, including Natural Resources Wales, Rhondda Cynon Taf Council and South Wales Fire and Rescue Service.

This exciting new partnership is aiming to better manage our hillsides for wildlife, and in doing so, better support the local communities in the Rhondda. Wildlife in the area is supported due to there being lots of different habitats, from heathland and acid grassland, to Oak woodland and coal spoil.

The dominant habitat in most places however is Bracken. Bracken is one of the reasons the valleys support so much wildlife, but the plant is highly competitive and without management can easily outcompete other important plants and habitats.

Bracken is one of the main sources of wildfires, which wreak havoc throughout the valley each summer. Wildfires not only destroy large areas of wildlife habitat, but also encourage more Bracken to grow on the bare charred soils, giving it a further competitive advantage.

Most recently, the Partnership has taken to an old traditional means of controlling Bracken – Bracken Bruising. Bruising the bracken damages the stem, affecting the supply of nutrients. This weakens the plants and reduces their cover allowing more light to the ground for other plants to grow and the true diversity of the mountainsides to flourish.

## FREEMAN FOCUS

**Valedictions:** The Trust was saddened to learn of the passing of the following Freeman: Derek Thomas (4966), David Thomas (2383), Edmund Miles (2432), Nigel Livsey Davies (4065) Vernon Rees (2284) and David Evans (2262).

**Cymdda Bach:** Trustees are working with the Llantrisant Community Garden group, "Grow for it" to potentially develop part of Cymdda Bach into a new local resource. The land will be used as an educational facility for different age groups interested in natural habitat and biodiversity.

**Fond Farewell:** Regrettably, Freeman John Berry has retired from his role on Llantrisant Town Trust. John was a huge support to three successive Clerks of the Trust and played a major role in many of its activities. We look forward to thanking him publicly at the next Court Leet Dinner in 2021.

**AGM:** Due to the Coronavirus pandemic lockdown period the Llantrisant Town Trust / Llantrisant Guildhall CIO could not hold its AGM in October. It is our intention to reschedule the AGM in April 2021. To be confirmed.

**Enrolment:** If you would like to enrol a Freeman, then visit [www.llantrisant.net](http://www.llantrisant.net) for application forms. Closing date is April 1<sup>st</sup> 2021.

## FREEMAN FOCUS

**Hereditary Right:** At the 2019 AGM it was agreed to allow new Freeman to enrol if they could their hereditary link to a past Freeman despite the amount of generations that have passed. The Trust agreed that for each new Freeman enrolled posthumously a further fee of £100.00 was required.

**Freeman's Database:** During the lockdown period a large project was undertaken to trace the postal or email addresses of all Freeman. Over several months the Clerk researched every Freeman who enrolled after 1955. The project shows that around 1,200 Freeman exist and we have contact details for over 850 of them. If you know of a Freeman who doesn't received regular updates, then send his email to [info@llantrisantguildhall.co.uk](mailto:info@llantrisantguildhall.co.uk)

**Court Leet:** For the first time in over 200 years the annual Court Leet Ceremony failed to go ahead in 2020 due to the lockdown restrictions imposed due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The ceremony and dinner has been rescheduled for May 21 2020. We will notify you of the confirmed date in due course.

**Tree Alert:** Thanks to Balmoral Tanks, a neighbour of Llantrisant Common for paying for the removal of a dead tree on Freeman's land. We are grateful for your support!

## GENEROUS DR PRICE DONATION



**Llantrisant Guildhall had a bright moment despite the Covid gloom when it welcomed two very special people to the building who had an early Christmas gift to present.**

Ninety-three-year-old Freeman Morgan John of Cardiff and his son-in-law Anthony Harries arranged to return to the Guildhall to make the presentation.

It was a specially framed souvenir handkerchief celebrating the 1893

National Eisteddfod of Pontypridd and illustrating Wales' most famous archdruid, Dr William Price.

This rare memento was produced a few months after Dr Price's own death aged 92.

The handkerchief was bought in Pontypridd by Morgan John's great aunt Naomi Davies and passed down to his mother Naomi of Cross Inn who married James John in 1921. It hung in their bedroom for almost fifty years.

Morgan is a great supporter of the Freeman and the Guildhall and felt the treasure should be enjoyed by its many visitors.

Llantrisant Guildhall is delighted with the new exhibition which will be given a pride of place in the Dr William Price collection for everyone to enjoy.

## GUILDHALL'S COVID LOCKDOWN

**Llantrisant Guildhall - the Freeman's home - re-opened in August 2019 following years of fundraising and restoration work to create a new heritage and visitors' centre.**

Our first six months was a great success when we welcomed over 4,000 people into the building and had a packed calendar of activities for all ages. Our wide range of events coupled with private hire, wedding bookings and dinners came close to covering the annual running costs of the Guildhall.



Sadly, Coronavirus pandemic caused us to lockdown for five months. After two months firebreak lockdown came and we closed once more. We re-opened and worked tirelessly to encourage visitors through the door.

Now Wales has gone into its third lockdown and we've been forced to close our doors for the foreseeable future.

However, bills still need to be paid when we are without any income.

Llantrisant Guildhall – a registered charity - needs your help. If every Freeman made an annual donation of £20 as a Friend of the Guildhall it would come close to covering our annual running costs. Unfortunately, less than 5% of Freeman are actually members. To survive for the long term, we need to increase this number dramatically.

You will receive a free copy of our book 'Llantrisant - An Historic Hilltop Town', regular updates and copies of our annual Friends of the Guildhall newsletter.

You may prefer to become a Patron of the Guildhall which is a £100 per year donation.

You can donate via PayPal, cheque or bank transfer.

For further details please email [info@llantrisantguildhall.co.uk](mailto:info@llantrisantguildhall.co.uk) to find out more.