
Death of a Gower teacher

By David O'Carroll OBE

I had been looking into the history of the public houses in Landimore and trying to uncover a bit about the history of the village school. These two pieces of research came together in an unexpected way.

Francis and Mary Davies ran the Three Brothers some time between their marriage in 1866 and 1881 (when the census recorded the pub and private house as uninhabited). They left to run the King Arthur in Reynoldston. The pub was still in-being in 1878 when it appears on the 1st Edition of the Ordnance Survey map.



The last mention I have found was in December 1882 when the Three Brothers, "in the occupation of George Rosser and another" was auctioned.

I was intrigued to find that a number of inquests were held at the Three Bothers in Landimore in the mid nineteenth century. These were troubled times. The nineteenth century was a period of great social upheaval and change in Wales.

During the 1830s support for the Chartist movement was widespread in the industrialised areas, when leaders such as Henry Vincent, John Frost and Zephaniah Williams led the campaign for social and political reform by holding large open-air meetings. This inevitably led to confrontation with the authorities.

There were riots in Newport in November 1839, when a crowd of 20,000 marched on the town, many of them bearing arms. Fighting arose in the street in front of the Westgate Hotel and over twenty protesters were killed as soldiers fired on the crowd.

The rural areas also saw social unrest - a result of the rapid increase in population, general poverty and the injustice and oppression of the landowners. This unrest led to the Rebecca Riots from 1839 until the middle of the 1840s.

The Daughters of Rebecca

The rioters main target were the numerous tollgates erected by the turnpike trusts at the end of the eighteenth century. The rioters, men dressed in women's clothing and known as the Daughters of Rebecca, attacked and destroyed the tollgates.

In December 1844 there was an inquest concerning the murder of Will Eynon, the toll gate keeper at Carterford. We do not think this was connected to the Rebecca unrest.

Will was an elderly man not able to defend himself. The accused was a Llanrhidian man named Christopher Batcot who had been returning from the Swansea market, late at night. No doubt the worse for stopping off at Taverns on the way home. No doubt hoping to evade the paying of the toll. He was sent for trial in Swansea.

The next in the list of Inquests concerned the death of Francis Batcock a teacher in Landimore. This was the first time I had found the name of a teacher at the Landimore school. I wondered. Had I stumbled across a revenge killing? Perhaps a family feud between the Eynons and Batcots? What murderous intentions would be uncovered at the inquest? My research into The Three Brothers was put to one side.

Who was Francis Batcock?

Francis was a Gower farmer born 1798 in Cheriton. He owned Cathan Farm to the south of Hardings Down by Druids Moor where he farmed 25 acres. He lived on the farm with his wife and six children. In 1841 he is shown as a farmer.

1	Francis Batcock	40	Farmer	Yes
	Elyzabeth Do	44		Yes
	David Do	15		Yes
	Ann Do	13		Yes
	Ruth Do	10		Yes
	John Do	8		Yes
	Francis Do	6		Yes
	Elyzabeth Do	4		Yes
	William Do	8		Yes

Francis became a teacher in his forties. Maybe because ill health prevented him farming. Or perhaps he needed the extra income. His eldest son David was born in 1825 so perhaps he was able to take over the running of the farm whilst his father was teaching. After his death, his wife and children continued to live and work the farm for over twenty years - so it was a going concern.

There is no evidence to make us believe he had received any training as a teacher.

The school in Landimore

The school was located in what is now Rose Cottage, set back from the lane running down from what were then the cross roads to the west of Landimore.

The school is mentioned in the 1849 Topical Dictionary of Wales. It states that

"A day school in connection with the Church of England was established in 1846 at the village of Landimore, where also are two Sunday schools on Church principles. The Calvinistic Methodists, likewise, have a place of worship in the parish, with a Sunday School held in it.

Malcolm Ridge in the Gower Journal #72 tells us:

The school had opened in 1846 in a 12' x 15' schoolroom in Landimore which was described as in bad repair.

The furniture and apparatus, however, were in good condition. None of the fifty scholars on the books had been at school for as much as a year...It must have been a rather crowded school-room

We know quite a bit about education on Gower at that time because of the Commission of Inquiry. The government in London decided that something had to be done about the unruly Welsh. The premise of the inquiry was that the "Welsh language is a vast drawback to Wales, and a manifold barrier to the moral progress and commercial prosperity of the people."

On the day of the Inspector's visit "children were being instructed in Holy Scripture, the Catechism, reading, writing (four on slates two on paper), English grammar, arithmetic and 'vocal music'.

The teacher, Francis Batcock, "a forty-eight year old former farmer" had taken up teaching four years earlier and received a salary 'from subscriptions and donations' of £25 a year, as well as having a house and garden free. A live-in farm servant in Reynoldston might

REPORTS

OF THE

COMMISSIONERS OF INQUIRY INTO THE STATE OF EDUCATION

IN

W A L E S,

APPOINTED BY THE COMMITTEE OF COUNCIL ON EDUCATION,

*In pursuance of Proceedings in the House of Commons, on the Motion of Mr. Williams, of March 10, 1840,
for an Address to the Queen, praying Her Majesty to direct an Inquiry to be made into the State of
Education in the Principality of Wales, and especially into the means afforded to the
Labouring Classes of acquiring a Knowledge of the English Language.*

receive between £3 and £6 a year at this time. Francis also ran a Sunday school in the same room which elder students attended. According to the 1841 census there were 53 children between 5 and 14 in the immediate Landimore area..

The report was published on 1 July 1847. The school at Landimore was summed up in 26 words. It might just as well have been the one word used in OFSTED reports: "Inadequate".

PARISH OF CHERITON.—I visited this parish on the 22nd of February, 1847. I called on the Rev. W. L. Collins, the incumbent. It contains Llandimow day-school, about a mile from the village of Cheriton, where there are two Sunday-schools in connection with the Church. There is another Sunday-school in the parish in connection with the Calvinistic Methodists. After the most diligent inquiry I was not able to hear of any other school in the parish.

DAVID WILLIAMS, *Assistant.*

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Such a peremptory judgment would have been devastating for Francis Batcock's self-esteem. An unnamed master at Wiston, Pembrokeshire was denigrated as a "thoroughly stupid and ignorant man."

Batcock's last journey

As the year came to its close, the criticism played on Francis's mind. Would they take his job away from him? Would he lose his income of £25 a year?

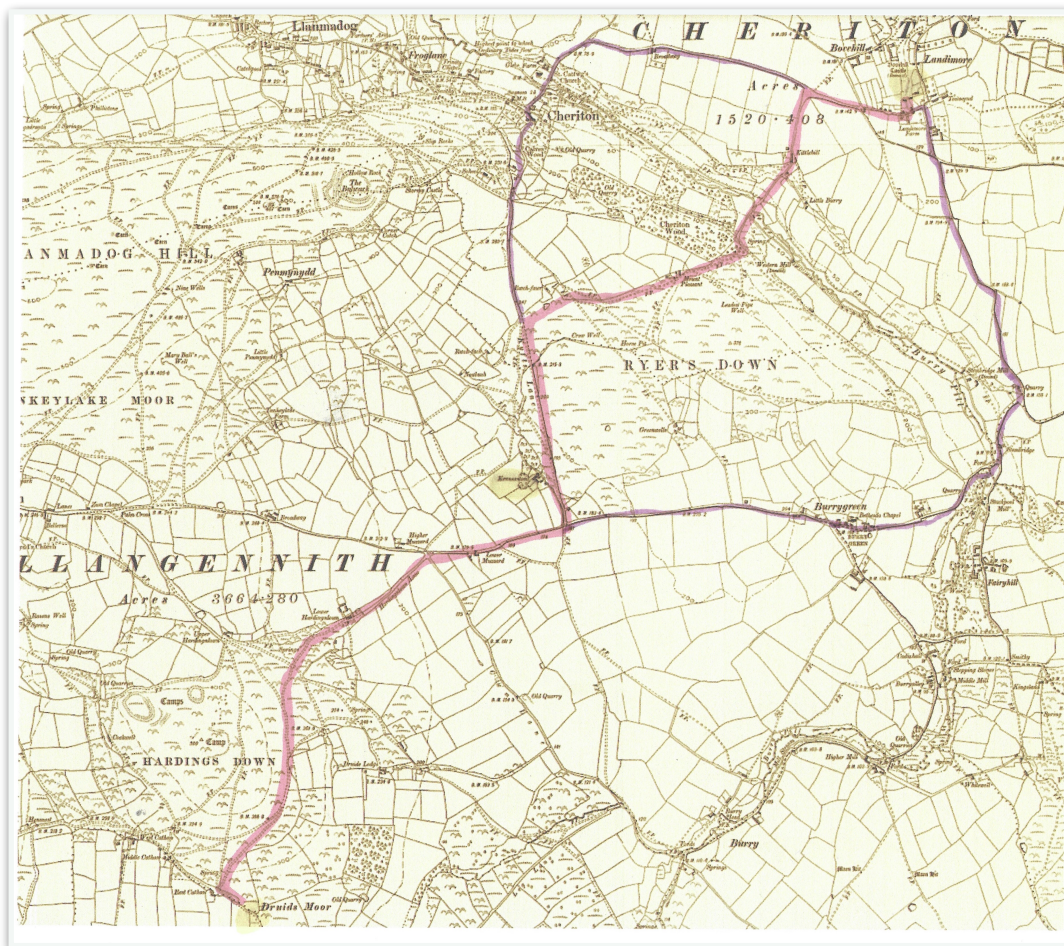


On 21 December, Francis made his daily journey to Landimore on horse from his home at Cathan Farm, Llandewi. He was perhaps accompanied by some of his children: John age 14, Francis 12, Elizabeth 10 and William aged 6. They may have run ahead, taking shortcuts to Landimore to meet friends on the way and to be at the school when their father arrived.

It was the Friday before Christmas - just another school day learning to read and write. Perhaps the Christmas story was read from the Bible and parts dictated by Francis for the children to copy out on their slates or paper for those who had some.

At the end of the school day the slates were cleaned; the school room tidied and after a prayer the children dismissed. John Batcock fetched his father's horse from the paddock at the side of the school and re-saddled the farm horse. The Pembrokehire Herald & General Advertiser reported on 31 December 1847 that Mr Batcock "the deceased kept a school in Landimore, and was in the habit of going to that place every morning, and returning in the evening."

We don't know which route Francis took home that fateful day. Perhaps he rode due South up Hors Stone Lane to Stembridge, then through Burry Green.



Or perhaps he rode, with his son walking beside him, all the way to Cheriton and then up the the sinuous coach-way leading to Kyfts Lane. Most likely, he went up the hill from the school and turned off the Cheriton road to Kite Hill and down the pack horse track to the "Roman Bridge". How often had he told the children that the Romans had not built the bridge; it was just an old packhorse route.



Riding up the North slope of Ryers Down he passed Mount Pleasant and then across the marshy land towards Kennexstone. The Pembrokeshire Herald reported that by the time they reached "Kinsington Moor" - I assume Kennexstone - Francis complained that he was feeling weary. He asked his son to lead the horse. John was not unduly concerned by this request. It had been a long day.

But as the winter light was failing, Francis begged his son to stop. "I must dismount". He lent forward onto the back of the horse's neck - struggling to get his leg over the horse's haunch. With his other foot already out of the stirrup he half rolled and half tumbled out of the saddle. John caught his father as best as he could. Francis struggled down onto his knees and knelt on the road.

He was a broken man. "Hold up my head, John." But by the time John had hold of his father, Francis Batcock had expired.

John told the inquest, held the next week in Cathan -"Father died in the attitude of prayer".

The newspaper ran the headline - SUDDEN DEATH ON THE ROAD.

I say - killed by the words of David Williams and the treachery of the Blue Books.

Brad y Llfrau Gleison