

# NEWSLETTER

## Colwall Village Society

### JULY 2010

Revealing Our Heritage

## CHAIRMAN'S REPORT AT AGM — 26th April 2010

We have had a splendid year — we held an unprecedented five public meetings, put on two exhibitions, entered the village quiz, continued to produce high quality newsletters and are near to publishing our historical/water map of the Parish.

Eda Ballard gave us a personal view of the Ballard family after last year's AGM. An extra meeting on 15th June welcomed Carl Attwood who shared with us his reminiscences of Colwall. A professional presentation in September from Paul Remfry discussed what little was known about the origins of the Herefordshire Beacon. In the New Year, Mike Lewis gave us a fascinating insight into the history of Hope End House. Finally, in March, Ian Rowat beguiled us with a colourful presentation showing the diverse flora and fauna of the Malvern Hills.

In June we braved the elements to display an exhibition at Colwall Primary School's Open Day, and in August counted another at The Annual Horticultural and Flower Show. At the latter we obtained people's views on who they would like to be the subject of our next plaque — Betty Snowball was the public's clear choice.

A group of three has been working hard to finalise the design of our maps showing on one side the historical features and on the other, the water features of the Parish — it is due to be published in September and a free copy will be given to each member.

If these activities could not have been possible without the enthusiasm and dedication of your committee, and I would like to record my very grateful thanks to John, Margaret, Derek, Marion, Susan, Conrad, Graham, and Deborah. Deborah is now stepping down to concentrate on other matters. Finally, what would we do without our two lovely tea ladies — Liz and Penny — who look after us so splendidly.

Michael Milne

## COLWALL FUNDAY DAY – 31<sup>st</sup> May 2010



Derek Rees, Marion Percy, Michael Milne, Conrad Shail



One of the 'Who Do You Think THEY Are?' displays

# PIERS PLOWMAN by Marion Percy

There are many questions asked about Piers Plowman and its author William Langland. Was he the legitimate son of Stacy (Eustace) de Rokayle who held land under the Dispensers in Oxfordshire? Was William born near the Malvern Hills in 1332? Would the family have been in the Malvern district near the Dispenser stronghold of Hanley Castle and the monasteries of Great Malvern and Tewkesbury, houses under Dispenser patronage? Was William just the name given to the figure of the dreamer or was he the actual author? Most important of all, were the A, B & C texts all the work of one man assuming that the author and the dreamer are the same person? In this article I am making no comment nor trying to answer these questions, I will leave that to the experts!

The word Langlands was discovered in a court roll of the manor of Barton Colwall dated 23<sup>rd</sup> April 1719. The Pewtress Spring formerly known as the Primeswell had been known traditionally as the place where Langland lay asleep and saw his vision. It was recorded twice in print.

## William Langland - the man

William Langland was probably born at Ledbury and not at Cleobury Mortimer as had been supposed. There is no reference to Cleobury in Langland's writings, no place of the name of Langland in the neighbourhood and no connection with his family can be discovered in relation to that place. Only in 1550 Robert Crowley published the first printed edition of Langland's works where it stated that 'Cleybirie' is 8 miles from the Malvern Hills. In fact Cleobury Mortimer is 23 miles away. In 1557-9 further writings and references mention 'Clybery near Malvern Hill'. Perhaps the word Clibery had become substituted for Lidbery.

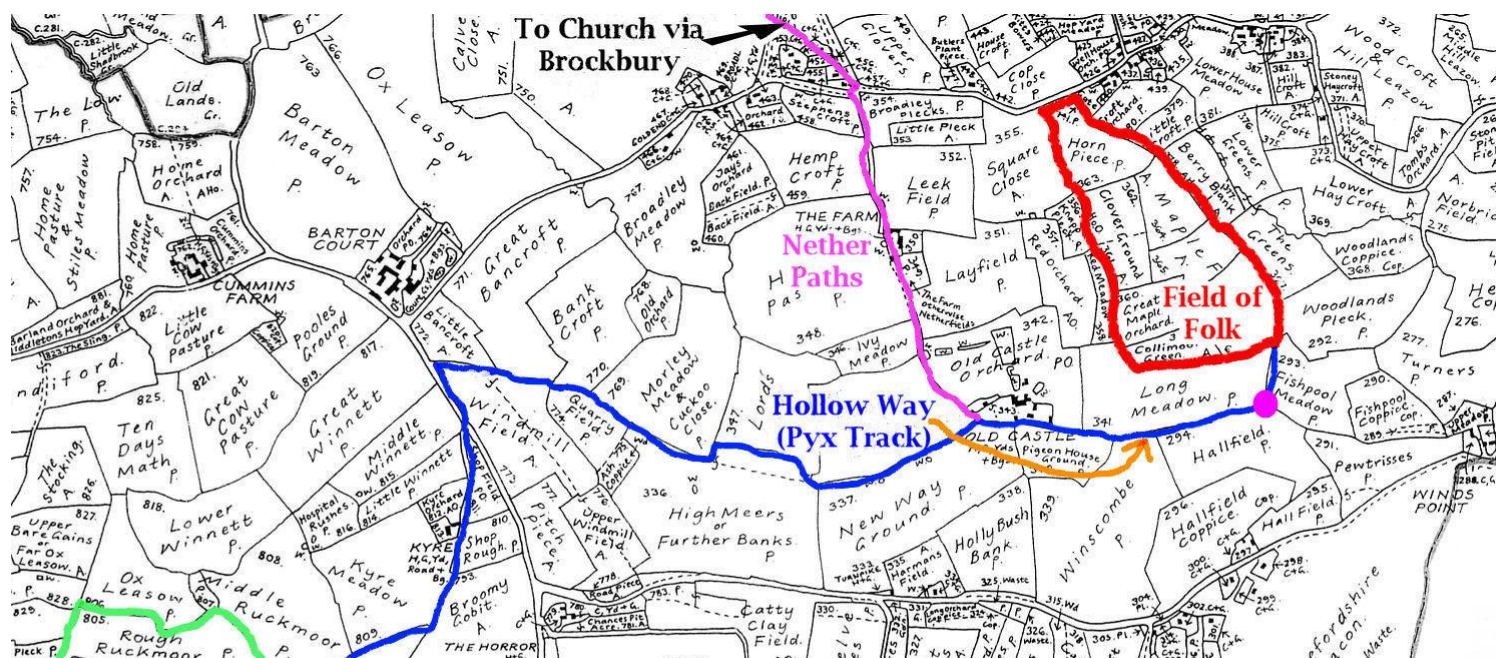
William probably went to school at the Priory at Great Malvern or Little Malvern. His home was at the Langland in Colwall Parish on the Ledbury boundary, where he possibly lived with his mother's relations. On 20 December 1348 he was ordained a priest in the parish church of Bromyard when he was 16 or 17 years old. He is sometimes called Robert, but never used the name himself, calling himself Will or Longwill.



William at the Little Priory

## Langland or the Langlands (refer to map below)

On the South boundary of the parish of Colwall is a large arable field which has been called for centuries and it is called Longland or the Langlands. This is not an uncommon name being derived from the field being two furlongs or furrowlongs in length. This field was the common arable field of the tenants of the manor of Barton Colwall. It lies on a flat piece of ground 387 feet above sea-level. Westward the ground slopes up to the wooded hills of Hope End, to the East it rises to the Herefordshire Beacon. A quarter of a mile away, overlooking it is a settlement of cottages and farms and an inn ('ale-house'), the Wellington. In the 14<sup>th</sup>C people living in this area worked





the manorial demesne of the prebendary of Barton Colwall. At this time the track which leads from Upton on the north side of the hill at what is now known as Winds Point, descended into the valley and after passing Old Castle broke into two tracks one leading to Netherpaths, Colwall Green, Brockbury and the Church of St James the Great, while the other, skirting the foot of the hill, turned sharply to the South and came out almost at the Longlands. The track from Winds Point to Old Castle is still a well defined hollow—way and was known additionally as the Pig or Pyx track due to the fact that the consecrated wafers were carried this way from Little Alvern Priory via Brockbury to the Parish Church.

In a terrier written at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> C is this entry: 'The old house by the Longlands adjoining the Ironpike Road leading to Ledbury and the old lane that divides Colwall and Ledbury leading towards Dumbleton is called Somers' land'. The 'old lane' was once the high road before the present road was made. The 'old house' now pulled down and replaced by two cottages, is in Ledbury Parish. This old house may have been the home of William Langland. It was here that 'folk' came to ask Piers the way to find St Truth. Most of the folk helped Piers with his work but some idlers sat in the ale-house and said "Hey! trolly lolly". Longlands with the ale-house overlooking it was the scene.

### the vision

The poem tells how William, weary of wandering, sleeps under a broad bank beside a little stream on the Alvern Hills one May morning and how he has a marvellous vision. What suggested the vision? Was it nothing more than the world as represented in a mystery play with Paradise on one side, Hell on the other and the world in between. The English method of presenting such plays was quite different, however, with separate wagons or pageants parading at intervals through the town. Thus it seems that he did actually see buildings and structures on which he based his word-picture. The road from the Longlands climbs up Chances Pitch and in a mile or so reaches the foot of Herefordshire Beacon. There is a curious fold or valley which runs from the summit crosses the road and ends in the level ground beneath. Just below the road in this valley is the Pewtress Spring from which water flows at the rate of 20,000 gallons in 24 hours. In Langland's time it was called the Prameswelle, later Primeswell. The stream which flowed from the spring was where Langland slept. Above this spot to the East is the Beacon and on its summit may still have been the remains of the Norman keep which is known to have existed in Stephen's time. Even if it had disappeared before Langland's day, the tradition would still remain. A deep dale was at the dreamer's



Stained glass window of Langland Dreaming

at while a little to his left was the dungeon of Old Castle. Although nothing now remains of the castle, the moat still exists and the island on which the castle was built probably only crumbled into the water around 150 years ago. Between Old Castle and the Beacon there is an area of fairly flat ground. It was here that William pictured the folk working and wandering as the world requires'.

**Fair field full of folk... of all manner of men,  
The poor and the rich, working and idling.**

He gives a rich picture of 14<sup>th</sup> C life, work and characters. Ploughman, friars, bishops, lawyers, burgesses, monks and taverners are all in the word-picture painted by Langland. One wonders if some of the characters were from the hamlet of Evendine, the taverner from Hartlands and the ploughman from Lower House Farm adjacent to the conjectural 'field of folk'. There is still evidence of ridge and furrow ploughing in these fields today. When his vision is finished William goes home to Langland, one mile distant.



### Brutner the Braggart and the Good Knight

Throughout Langland's writings with the exception of Piers Plowman and Haukyn, the active man, there is hardly a character who is more than sketched. The Good Knight however is a live man and in the guise of allegory appears in the early part of the poem. Who was Brutner the braggart and who was the Good Knight?

It was recorded in 1354 that there were complaints from the bishop's tenants in Cradley, Bosbury and

ockbury, in Colwall. There is reference to a fine concerning James de Brockbury and Simon de Brockbury whose sids are in 'Codyngton and Colewall'. It seems likely that James was the Good Knight. William gives a description Brockbury and his directions are as follows. 'Go forth by a brook till you find a ford, wade through the water; en you will come to a croft, but don't enter; two stocks stand there, but stay not, leave them on the left then turn a hillock and come to a court, clear as the sun, with a moat the manor all around; the tower that holds Truth is t above the sun'. The Herefordshire Beacon on which was the tower, faces Brockbury about a mile away. It is obable that at one time William might have acted as tutor at Brockbury to James' second wife and her step-ildren.

### **William's Later Life**

About 1355 William went to London. He had no name and he could not advance in the Church because of illegitimacy. In Colwall he was known as Will or Long Will and his ordination name was given as Willelmus de Colewall, but he would not have dared seriously to take the name of Colwall as Bishop Trilleck was lord of the manor of Colwall and had a residence in that Parish (the Bishop's hunting lodge, now Park Farm). William therefore opted the name of Langland or Longland from the place where he had spent many years of his life and which may have been connected with his mother's family. He may also have enjoyed the pun. His father would not let him take name of 'Rokayle' and finally he gives a name to himself – 'my name is Longe Wille' - William Longland. Evidently he got older, he felt the stigma of his birth more and more and consequently disliked the name of Longland. e mentions Malvern only four times but there is considerable significance on each occasion and in his old age his ind naturally reverted to the scenes of his youth on the Malvern Hills. He died in 1399.

Acknowledgement: All ideas, references and quotations are taken from - Allan H. Bright & Geoffrey Cumberlege, 'New Light on Piers Plowman' [Oxford University Press].

## **Colwall Ghost Stories**

If you are interested in hearing any ghostly experiences you may have had or any tales you can relate from your friends or relatives, concerning the village or surrounding area. Please contact a Committee member or email: [colwall-ghosts@live.co.uk](mailto:colwall-ghosts@live.co.uk) or post to 'Ghost Stories', [REDACTED]

## **Michael Burke – RIP**

The Society wishes to record its appreciation of the support and guidance of Michael Burke who passed away recently. He was one of the earliest members of the Society and Vice-Chairman for many years. We wish to express our condolences to Margaret and family.

## **Future Talks**

### **11<sup>th</sup> September 2010:**

Margaret Ferguson : 'Not Just a Railway Village, 1800 – 1930'

### **17<sup>th</sup> January 2011:**

John Bridges : 'Colwall Church'

### **18<sup>th</sup> April 2011 [AGM]:**

Elizabeth Lloyd : 'The Bright Family of Colwall'

### **19<sup>th</sup> September 2011**

Speaker yet to be chosen

### **Finally ...**

I have been producing the current version of the newsletter for 18 months and so far have had very little feedback from our general members on the format or the articles published. Is that because it is unread or perfect? Neither of which I believe to be true, so please get in touch and let me or any Committee member know your thoughts. DGR

Thanks to our contributors. Articles on Colwall related subjects (however tenuous!) are always welcome.

If you are prepared to receive your newsletters by electronic means, please register with the email address below.

Corrections and additions to the information in newsletters are always welcome, as are CONTRIBUTIONS!

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