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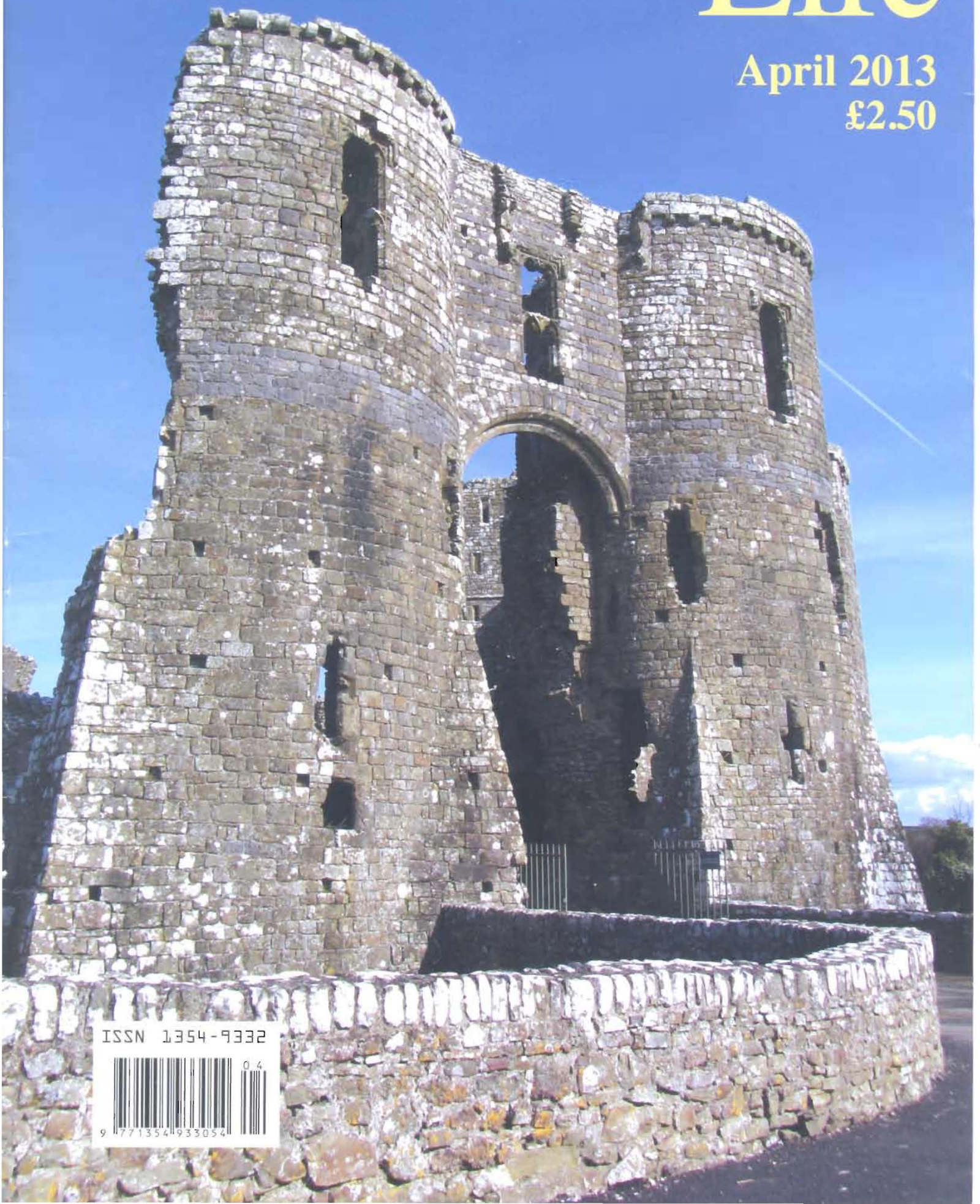

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Pam Hunt delves into the forgotten Flemish history of a corner of Pembrokeshire - and discovers a mystery or two

The village with six names

ON THE face of it, it's an estuary village like many others in Pembrokeshire, nothing special. Three places of worship, a shop, a pub and a rugby club.

But as you drive past the village sign, you might raise an eyebrow at its name and wonder why – in the heart of what is known as 'Little England beyond Wales' – there is a village with a Welsh name.

All the other villages around carry names like Freystrop, Johnston, Rosemarket, Houghton and Burton, but you've just gone past a sign that says 'Llangwm'. Surely not?

Then you spot the name 'Langum' on the village school building. That makes sense, but why the two spellings you wonder?

A visit to St Jerome's Church then creates another question in your mind. What on earth are the effigies of a knight and his lady set under highly ornate 14th century arches doing in what is apparently a Victorian Church?

Llangwm Church from north-west. All photographs by Graham Stephens.

The effigies of (it is thought) Lady Johanna De La Roche and Sir David De la Roche under the decorative Norman arches.

This is a mystery that has held me spellbound since retiring to Pembrokeshire in 2006. As a retired television documentary producer specialising in history programmes, I used to look for what we used to call the 'Wow Factor' – and as Llangwm's Local History Society started digging into this story, the 'Wow Factors' started to arrive thick and fast.

Wind the clock right back to the 8th or 9th century, when the Vikings sailed up the Cleddau to see through the cold winter months. Many place names in south Pembrokeshire derive from this period and it seems that Llangwm is no exception.

Freystrop is from Freya's Thorpe. Freya was a Norse

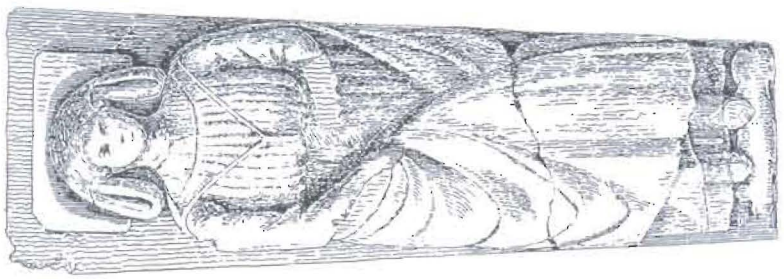
goddess of love and Thorpe means village.

For Llangwm, the Vikings chose Langheim, meaning 'long home'.

Scroll forwards to the late 11th century. William II was on the throne in England and some of the invading Norman noblemen – not satisfied with their new English estates – decided that there were some rather nice pickings to be had in both the south and north of Wales.

At school I had learned about the impact of the Norman invasion and how they quickly disposed of the Anglo Saxon culture across England. But what I hadn't realised was that it wasn't just Normans who had invaded in 1066, there were Breton, French and Flemish nobles too, all after a slice of the cake.

Many of those who came to Pembrokeshire were Flemish. So, judging by the effigies in the church, Llangwm must have had its own Flemish nobles. But who were they?



Left: A line drawing of the effigy of Lady Johanna De la Roche, made in 1811 for Richard Fenton's book A Historical tour through Pembrokeshire. Above: Effigy of Lady Johanna De la Roche, showing how it has degraded as a result of two centuries of damp.

It didn't take long to work out that they were probably De la Roches who had descended from Godiebert the Fleming, himself born in 1096 in the stockade that became Pembroke Castle.

It was simple to discover Godiebert's descendents and to learn that they became a powerful and influential family, but who were his ancestors?

We still don't know, but there is one small clue which might suggest an answer. William Duke of Normandy had married Matilda of Flanders in 1058, just eight years before the Battle of Hastings. Matilda was wealthy and had funded the building of the *Mora*, William's flagship.

So it is likely that members of her family, especially her brothers Baldwin and Rodbert would have taken part in this invasion.

We discover that Godiebert's youngest son was also called Rodbert. Could it be that Mathilda's brother Rodbert was Godiebert's father or grandfather? The name Rodbert and eventually Robert appears several times in the family tree.

IT WAS during the reign of Henry I, some time between 1107 and 1112, that the great migration of Flemings started to take place having fled major flooding in Flanders. Most headed to south Pembrokeshire – Henry wasn't too happy about so many settling near London – and within 40 years, the Flemish colonists had established a large presence in the county.

For the people of Pembrokeshire it must have seemed like the American Indian experience of European settlers 400 years later, when a people with a different language and culture settled among them.

Indeed the new settlers here undertook a form of 'ethnic cleansing' to clear the indigenous Welsh away to the north of the county and then built a chain of defensive castles along what is known as the Landsker Line. And, as we are all aware, a difference still exists today with what is largely an anglicised language and culture to the south, and a Welsh language and culture to the north.

Gerald of Wales, himself the son of a Norman / Flemish father and a Welsh mother, wrote of the people of south Pembrokeshire in 1188:

The inhabitants of this province derived their origin from Flanders, and were sent by King Henry I to inhabit these districts; a people brave and robust, ever most hostile to the Welsh; a people, I say, well versed in commerce and woollen manufactories; a people anxious to seek gain by sea or land, in defiance of fatigue and danger; a hardy race, equally fitted for the plough or the sword; a people brave and happy'.

He may have been thinking of Godiebert's oldest son Richard when writing this. Richard is reputed to have joined Strongbow's invasion of Ireland in 1168, but other records suggest that he actually went over to Ireland a year earlier at the invitation of Dermot, an Irish king. He's mentioned in the Norman French poem, *The Song of Dermot the Earl.*

Continued

The two Norman archways that lead into the De Ia Roche Chapel.

The village with six names

Roughly translated, this poem includes the lines:

But Dermot, the noble king, did not bring with his warriors any Englishmen on this occasion, according to the account of my informant,

Except one Richard, as I have heard said, a knight of Pembrokeshire. Richard, the son of Godiebert, a knight he was of good parts,

Together with his knights, archers and sergeants, but I know not how many.

Richard's younger brother Rodbert did not take part in the Irish adventure; he had died in 1165, two years before.

He had settled in Llangwm, then known as 'Landegunnie' some time around 1150 and built a castellated manor house at what is now Great Nash. He died leaving three young sons, David, Henry and Adam.

As the Local History Society unravelled one answer while researching this story, inevitably more questions would arise.

Part of the ruins of the De la Roche manor house at Great Nash. The present house which can be seen in the background, gives an idea of how big the manor was.

While some records state that Adam was the oldest and David the youngest, other records turn that on its head, saying that David was the oldest being born in 1156, Henry in 1158 and Adam in 1160. That fits in with the oldest son inheriting the family estate in Landegunnie.

But by far the best known of this generation was Adam. He built Pill Priory and the castle at Roch in the late 12th century. This is also the first time that the name De la Roche is recorded.

So why change from Fitzgodiebert as they were originally known? Well it seems that the Flemings were eager to be more like the Normans and turned their backs on their own heritage.

If Adam was the oldest, then why did he not inherit the family seat in Landegunnie instead of going to build a castle at Roch? And why does an old legend of Pembrokeshire say that after his death and burial at Roch, Adam's coffin was mysteriously found at the doorway to the church in Landegunnie the following morning?

According to the legend, the coffin was returned to Roch, but again a day later, it was back in Landegunnie. We all know that legends can be far-fetched, but there is always a grain of truth linked to them.

Could it be that Adam had expressed the wish to be buried with his family in Landegunnie?

This now raises another question. It was very rare for nobility to be buried in the earth, so where is the De la Roche family crypt? Could it be under the chancel of Llangwm's church?

BY THE early 13th century, David's branch of the family is referred to as 'The Lords of Landegunnie and Mayclochau' – obviously by now influential people.

But 70 years later, the name Landegunnie has disappeared and we discover that David de La Roche's grandson is called Sir Gilbert De la Roche, Lord of 'Landigan'. The village's name has changed again!

Ruins of Great Nash manor viewed from the south.

Adam's branch of the family thrived from the late 12th century; many were now well established in Ireland and others had taken advantage of 'good marriages' to nobility in England.

In spite of being ennobled, David's branch hadn't enjoyed the same success. Then in 1316 a marriage took place that would guarantee a more financially secure future, when the 26-year-old lord of Landigan married a 16-year-old girl. He was Sir David De La Roche, the great grandson of David and she was Lady Johanna De la Roche, the great granddaughter of Adam – and she arrived with a significant dowry.

Llangwm's church was built around 1200, although there was an earlier church, possibly 8th century, on the same site.

Not long after the marriage of Sir David and Lady Johanna, extensive works took place to the north promontory of the building to create a family chapel, probably using some of Lady Johanna's dowry.

The Landigan branch of the family only lasted another three generations. The death of Sir Thomas De la Roche with no male heir in 1403 meant that the Landigan lands reverted to the king.

Several questions have been answered, but in turn they have raised new questions and the research goes on. Some answers may be hidden away both in and underneath St. Jerome's Church.

THE CHURCH itself was last renovated in 1879 when much was done to modernise it, at the same time losing a lot of its medieval fabric. Plans are presently being put together and funding sought to make the building fit for the 21st century.

While that work progresses there will be an archaeological opportunity to discover whether there is a family crypt under the Chancel and also to try to learn more about the lifestyle of this family from external archaeological investigation conducted by the Llangwm community under the guidance of The Dyfed Archaeological Trust.

Documentary research is also underway and every morsel of information we can glean about this dynasty that dominated Llangwm for nearly 300 years will be correlated to enable the setting up of a wall-mounted heritage display in what was the De la Roche family chapel.

Fund-raising starts this Easter with the sale launch of a limited edition print of an etching of the church by local artist Ian Jacob.

It is hoped that all the funds will be raised and the project completed in time for the 700th anniversary of the wedding of Lady Johanna and Sir David De is Roche. This will be celebrated with a re-enactment of the wedding and a medieval wedding banquet for the people of the village.

So what about the six names? We've only mentioned five so far.

Well, records suggest that Landigan became Langomme some time after the demise of the De la Roches and Langomme morphed into Langum in the late 16th or early 17th century.

It became Llangwm almost by accident at the start of the 20th century when Henry Evans, Llangwm's first Welsh-speaking Rector, surmised that the name of the village must have been derived from Llan Cwm, Welsh for the church in the valley.

Was it called that before the arrival of the Vikings in the 8th century? We'll never know.

All we do know is that the locals still call it Langum and raise an eyebrow should a stranger use the Welsh pronunciation.

Pam Hunt

The great and the good...

A gathering of local worthies outside the Poor Law Institution – previously known as the Union Workhouse – at Riverside, Pembroke. The occasion is unknown, but it could be a valedictory photocall to mark the Local Government Act of 1929 which officially abolished the Boards of Guardians who had previously administered parish poor relief; the presence of churchmen and landowners from various local parishes lends support to this theory. The photograph was loaned by Rosalie Lilwall of Pembroke Main Street who is keen to fill in the gaps in the list of names below.

Left to right. Front row: ?, Matron Morris, Loftus Adams, Mrs Adams, Mrs Annie D Thomas, ?, Col Cadle (Whitehall), David John (Argyle Street, Pembroke Dock), George Griffiths (Cycle Shop, Pembroke), A G O Mathias (Pembroke Savings Bank), Mrs Perrin (Warreston), ?, David H Lloyd (Minister of Thorne Chapel).

Second row: ?, ?, The Rev Tudor Evans (Monkton), ?, General Leach, ?, Tom 'Wiggy' Evans (Monkton), Arthur Clegg, ?, Owen Hire (Park Street), ?, ?, John Hay, Maurice Thomas (Upton Farm) ?.

Third row: ?, ?, ?, ?, Fred Gay (Pennar), ?, Edward Roberts, ?, ?, Dan Davies (Eaton House), Wilfred Davies (Merlin's Cross - newspaper reporter), F S Jones (clerk to Pembroke RDC).

Fourth row: Mr Morris, ?, ?, ?, ?, Dr Tristram Samuel, Dr Howells (Tenby), Dr Teddy Saunders, ?, L M G Russell (Yerbeston), Tommy Morris (Castlemartin), Jim Griffiths (Merrion), ?.

Fifth row: Colin Warlow (Telegraph reporter), ?, Billy Morris (son of Matron), ?, Police Sergeant Joe Griffiths, Billy Bentley (Master of Croft House children's home).

Richard Howells reveals how a village is ensuring that future generations will not forget the supreme sacrifice young men from the community paid in the cause of freedom

Heroes of Hook remembered

THE YOUNG men of Hook who paid the supreme sacrifice in the two World Wars have been honoured with memorial pictures which now hang in pride of place in Hook Sports Club.

The beautifully framed memorials not only carry pictures of the young men but details of the tragic circumstances surrounding their deaths and the medals they were awarded.

The project got underway when the village war memorial was relocated in the Miners' Memorial Garden and, at the same time, the village History Society was formed.

It was realised that the younger generations and newcomers to the village knew very little about these brave young men and, unless action was taken fairly promptly, with the passing of the years information would be increasingly difficult to come by.

Volunteering to research and execute the memorial portraits plan were father and son, Stuart and Tom Blaxland, and the task was finalised earlier this year.

Where should the memorials hang?

When these men were in their prime the hub of village life was the old Miners' Institute where, apart from housing a snooker table (the pride and joy of a Hook trophy-winning snooker team), the hall would have been the venue for every village activity from wakes to weddings; from dances to weekly film shows.

The Institute fell victim to the ravages of time and had to be demolished, but its place in the community has been filled by the modern and well-appointed Sports Club – so where better to place the memorials, especially as they now rest overlooking the snooker table!

The memorials were formally dedicated before friends, family, representatives of the British Legion and Sports Club members.

The circumstances surrounding the fallen heroes were outlined by Sam Blaxland and a short dedication performed by the Rev Denis Payne.

The script on the memorials tells chilling tales of ships being sunk with over 1,000 young men perishing in a single action and of a young pilot from the village nursing a crippled bomber across France and over the channel, only to fatally crash near Dover.

Gwilym Rhys Jones.

Jim James.

THERE are five names on the War Memorial and four pictures in the club – but it is not an oversight.

The fifth man, Lt Gwilym Jones, who was killed in action in WWI, was the headmaster of Hook School. He volunteered for service, and shortly after he was commissioned as Second Lieutenant in the Royal Welsh Fusiliers he lost his life at Gallipoli.

Mr Jones, who was from south Wales, was held in such high regard in the village it was decided that he too should be remembered – so his name went on the village war memorial.

With the passing of the years tracing the former teacher's family proved very difficult. It was, however, agreed the headmaster should and indeed would want to go back to his children so his memorial portrait now rests in the village school which, incidentally, celebrates its centenary next year – also the centenary of the outbreak of the First World War.

The memorials to the individuals who were killed in action read as follows:

Gwilym Rhys Jones
Lieutenant, Royal Welsh Fusiliers

GWILYM was the head of Hook village school when he volunteered and was commissioned into the 6th Battalion, Royal Welsh Fusiliers on March 19, 1915.

The battalion was attached to 158 Brigade, 53rd (Welsh) Division, and on July 19, 1915 sailed from Devonport for Imbros, before landing at 'C' Beach, Suvla Bay, Gallipoli on August 9, 1915.

158 Brigade left the beach next morning and headed over the Salt Lake towards the Turkish positions at Scimitar Hill. The attack was muddled, and many men were caught in the open by shellfire and bullets. Gwilym was killed in action during this initial advance.

He has no known grave, and is commemorated on the Helles Memorial, Gallipoli.

(A commemorative framed picture including this script and the medals the headmaster was awarded now hangs in Hook school).

James Henry James
Stoker 1st Class

JAMES, known as Jim, was the son of Joseph Talmace James and Olive James, of Llangwm.

He served with the Royal Navy, as a stoker aboard the aircraft carrier HMS Glorious.

At the start of the Second World War, Glorious took part in the hunt for the Graf Spee in the Indian Ocean before returning to the Mediterranean; she was recalled in April 1940 to support British operations in Norway.

While evacuating British aircraft from Norway on June 8, 1941, Glorious was sunk by the German battleships Scharnhorst and. Gneisenau with the loss of over 1,000 lives.

James was among the men lost that day. He was 21, and is commemorated on the Plymouth Naval Memorial, Devon.

Wilfred Martin Thomas
Flight Segeant (Pilot)
RAF Volunteer Reserve

WILFRED – always known as Martin – was the son of William and Mary Jane Thomas of Hook. He enlisted into the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve at the outbreak of war and joined the MOD's Meteorological Department.

In 1941 he volunteered to train as a pilot. He was successful in his training and was posted to 226 Squadron, which was equipped with the Mitchell Mark II bomber.

In November 1943, 226 Squadron was engaged with other units in Operation Crossbow, the Allied bombing offensive against the German V-weapon sites.

On November 25, 1943, Martin was piloting a Mitchell during a raid on a section of the Atlantic Wall at Audinghen, near Calais, France, when it was hit by flak.

He managed to nurse the stricken aircraft back over the Channel, but it crashed near Dover, killing Martin and the three other crewmen.

Wilfred Martin Thomas was 23 years old and is buried in the grounds of Hook Gospel Mission.

Martin Thomas.

William Henry Hitchings

Owen Jones.

William Henry Hitchings
Private, East Yorkshire Regiment

WILLIAM, known as Bill was the son of Frederick and Sarah Hitchings, of Sprinkle Pill, Hook.

He enlisted at Cardiff into the Army, and was posted to the 1/4th Battalion, East Yorkshire Regiment, which was attached to 150 Brigade, 50th (Northumbrian) Division.

After moving to France in April 1915 the Division moved to Ypres, where it took part in the Second Battle of Ypres from April to June 1915.

During the summer of 1916 the Division was on the Somme, where it fought at the Battle of Flers-Courcelette, the Battle of Morval and the Battle of Le Transloy.

The Division also took part in the Arras Offensive of April 1917, and fought at the First Battle of the Scarpe, capturing the Wancourt Ridge.

Bill was killed at Arras on April 23, 1917, aged 21, and is commemorated on the Arras Memorial, France.

Alfred Owen James
Chief Petty Officer Stoker

ALFRED – always known as Owen – was born in 1904. He served with the Royal Navy, as Chief Petty Officer Stoker aboard the destroyer HMS Diamond. HMS Diamond was a D class destroyer of the Royal Navy.

In April, 1941, under the command of Lt Commander Cartwright, HMS Diamond rescued 800 troops from Crete after their transports were attacked.

The following day, HMS Diamond and another destroyer, HMS Wryneck attempted to rescue troops from a stricken Dutch troop ship, the Slamat.

However, both ships were attacked and sunk by German Junkers 87 Stuka dive bombers. Approximately 253 officers and crew, as well as 800 troops were lost from both vessels. Only 23 were rescued.

Owen is commemorated on the Plymouth Naval Memorial, Devon.

AT THE dedication ceremony a spokesman for the History Society thanked all those who had contributed to the exercise and the success of the evening including the families of the servicemen; the Blaxland family; the head teacher of the village school; members of the committee of Hook Club and all those who made financial contributions.

Wartime memorials project

TO mark the centenary of the start of WWI, the north Pembrokeshire-based Saints and Stones Group is organising a competition for projects which record the various war memorials in the county and uncover the stories behind them.

Individuals, organisations and community groups can enter the competition which covers all the different types of memorial to those who have fallen in conflict over the past 100 years.

For information, contact Anne Eastham on 01348 873316.