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Hi Steve. This is an update on what you already have – sorry for any repetition. If you want to use any of it for the Newsletter, you're welcome.

### Elephant Rock and Barley Hill

For those who do not know the area the elephant is an image carved onto a rock face on Barley Hill situated high up on a prominent rocky outcrop overlooking the site of the former Union Workhouse, now Dan Y Bryn Home on Brecon Road. I was informed many years ago that Barley Hill was formerly known as Birlip Hill. Tom Williams of Pontardawe, one of the founders of the Swansea Valley History Society c1976, told me in the early 1980s that a circus had visited Pontardawe just after the First World War and it had an elephant in one of their acts, and a quarryman who had seen the elephant carved the image of the unusual animal he had seen. I photographed the rock in 1986 when the elephant was much better outlined and with other features also visible. When I visited the rock again in 2012 much of the rock had weathered and some of the features had disappeared. The rock is only 78 inches long and 33 inches high at its tallest point with the elephant in the right-hand bottom corner. The elephant in question is only 12 inches long and 11 inches high. In the 1980s an image of a man was visible in front of the elephant. He was only about six inches high. That would have been the elephant trainer or mahout. The date 1925 was visible above the elephant in 1986, and that fits in perfectly with Tom Williams information on the circus visiting Pontardawe.

Enclosed is the photograph I took in 1986 and a sketch of 2012 explaining the features.

What readers have to bear in mind is that Barely Hill was not as it appears to us today covered in mature trees and an attractive hill to look at and walk in. It was very heavily quarried for its building stone with large and small quarries extending from James Street all the way up to Ynysmeudwy. A photograph of one of the working quarries was published in Around Pontardawe (The Second Series) in 1999. The photograph was taken in 1911 and shows men breaking up the stone into building size blocks for the construction of the Pontardawe Higher Elementary School, later to become the grammar school. Every cottage, farm, house, shop, police station, school, workhouse, chapel, pub, shop, boundary wall to properties from the Cross area of Pontardawe to Llangiwg Road was quarried from Barley Hill. And not just building stone but flag stones for the kitchen floor, the kitchen mainc (or cold slab that every home had before the advent of refrigerators), window cills, the front doorway step, paving stones for paths to and around dwellings and properties, paving slabs for public pavements, and gravestones for the departed, and from Mynnydd Marchywel before the use of slate tiles, thin beds of tiling stone were quarried for roofing. Stone was the premier building material before the advent of brick and concrete.



1911 photograph of the quarry

Barely Hill is not a solid rock formation but layers of rock of different thicknesses. It looks like a solid mass to us because we can rarely see any sign of joints in the stone, and the mass of vegetation such as trees, grass etc now hides many of those features, but in few places one can see on the outer cliff-like faces the jointing lines between the rock layers. The stone is a Pennant sandstone that was formed hundreds of millions of years ago created from older rocks that had been eroded from earlier mountain ranges by wind, rain and ice. That erosion created sand that was washed into ancient seas where the sand became sediments that eventually formed layers on the seabed. Over many millions of years, the seas dried out and then were reformed so creating new

seas with new layers of sediments, and eventually the hard compacted sand sediments in turn became sandstone. Several hundred million years later through earth movements, those sea beds were raised up into new mountains, and again over a very long period they became worn down into our valleys and hills.

Quarrying stone was hard physical work and the quarrymen were adept at using their tools to create building blocks, not just breaking large rocks. Among the trades at the quarries were quarrymen, stone cutters, masons, sledge man to transport the rocks, skilled and unskilled labourers' and blacksmiths to sharpen the tools. The quarrymen would drive steel or wooden wedges into the joints visible between the beds or layers of stone. Those joints are known as bedding planes and have very thin layers of clay between each bed of stone separating them and making stone extraction an easier operation for the quarrymen. If wooden wedges were used, they were then soaked with water to make them swell, and that swelling would eventually lift and separate the rock. Thinner layers could be raised and separated with steel wedges. Crow bars were used to move large blocks of stone into position for breaking or dressing. Sledge hammers were regularly used to break larger blocks into more manageable sizes.

The large miss-shapen rocks had to be formed into rectangular or square blocks suitable for building purposes. The outer faces of the stones were then "dressed" by chiseling neat edges onto them. If readers look at many houses in the Pontardawe area they will notice a neat cut edge on the outer face of the stones. That was the "dressing". A good friend of mine in the 1980s was Gordon Williams, a former quarryman and builder who at one time worked in Michaels Quarry at the bottom of Gellifowy Road,

Ynysmeudwy. Gordon used to shape and dress the stone building blocks. He told me he was paid one farthing per foot for that work with most stones having outer measurements of about 15 inches by six to eight inches in thickness. Gordon's last job was in the late 1980s building a new entrance porch to Mount Elim Evangelical Chapel in Ynysmeudwy.

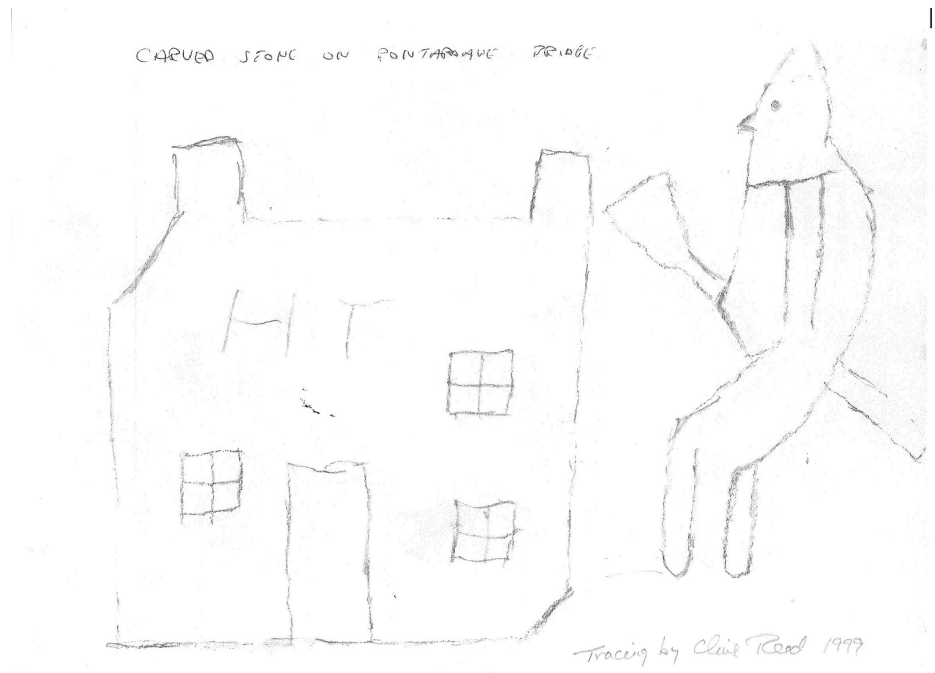
Many of the quarrymen and stonemasons cut images in former quarries in the area. In a small quarry near Ynysmeudwy Community Centre are human faces chiseled into the rock face. Gordon Williams, also one of the founding members of the Swansea Valley History Society, told me many years ago that there used to be a row of small cottages at the bottom of Llangiwg Road which were roofed with thatch not stone tiles. They were built long before the township of Pontardawe came into being. The remains of those cottages still survive on the hillside overlooking the Ynysmeudwy Community Centre and the children's playground at the bottom of Llangiwg Road (hill). The stone for those tiny cottages was cut out of the hillside immediately alongside them so making the transporting of stone less of a problem. The two quarries are very small and much overgrown and probably do not give an image of what a quarry looks like, but on the rear wall of one of those quarries are, or were, the two faces.

The walls of the cottages were still standing to about four feet high when I last visited them some time ago, and the rooms inside were very small. I used to wonder what it must have been like to live in those and bring up a family of children and workers. It was a hard life in the past.

Overlooking Pontardawe on Alltwen Hill, an image of St Peters Church is cut into a large flat stone slab that would have been cut after 1858 when the church was completed. I discovered a carved stone on Pontardawe Bridge in the 1980s whilst being a duck catcher for Pontardawe Folk Festival's Duck Race. This again is much weathered but I managed a tracing in 1999. This shows a witch flying a broomstick. The tracing is enclosed. The building depicted is the Gwachel, which is Welsh for witch. The original building was a small cottage as depicted here. The initials HT do not convey anything to me.

#### Gwachel witch tracing

Stonemasons regularly cut dates into stones to show when the buildings were erected. Ynysmeudwy Uchaf Farm for example has the date 1759 and the initials TL and CL cut into the lintel of the former cow bier. I am sure there are many more yet unrecorded carved stones in the Pontardawe area. I look forward to seeing their images in future newsletter of the society.



Clive Reed, Pontardawe 2021.