



FACTsheet 23

Penmaenmawr's Band of Mercy

Whenever we think of organisations advocating for animal welfare, it's likely that the RSPCA springs to mind. But it was not the only active animal welfare organisation in the 19th century. Bands of Mercy were established by Catherine Smithies in 1875, modelled on the 'Band of Hope' temperance movement.

The Band of Mercy was a national movement with locally-organised groups that aimed to teach children and adults to be kind to animals. By 1882, the RSPCA had taken responsibility for the Band of Mercy groups and publications.

The Penmaenmawr branch of the Band of Mercy was established in the late 1880s by Mary Jane Morrish of Plas Coch. Mary visited local schools to speak to the children (often taking gifts such as skipping ropes and footballs); she organised and funded educational trips for the owners of working donkeys, to 'get them on side'; and she regularly held fundraising events for the cause. One of these events was a garden party at Plas Coch, attended by people like the Darbishires and Pictons.



Penmaenmawr's Band of Mercy

Mary led Penmaenmawr's Band of Mercy for over twenty years and newspaper reports suggest that her efforts were appreciated across the Welsh and English-speaking communities. Her willingness to 'roll her sleeves up' and appeal directly to children, and adults who owned working animals, was quite pioneering at the time. Today we would liken this approach to an early form of community education.

The reason that Mary's work came to our attention is because Penmaenmawr Museum has recently acquired a copy of the land conveyances for Plas Coch. These beautifully scribed documents, sealed with wax, outline the portion of land that was originally purchased by Mary's father, Rev'd R Yonge, in 1885.



Mary's father and her husband James Fox Morrish, then transferred the land to Mary in 1887. We're not sure why it was transferred to her name. Mary and James built Plas Coch and remained in the property until their deaths (Mary in 1919 and James in 1921).

If you research the surname 'Morrish' in Penmaenmawr, you'll see that Mary, James and their daughter Edith, were very active in welfare and fundraising activities in the community throughout their time here. Edith's wedding was held in Penmaenmawr in 1907, when she married Thomas Richard Holland, a wealthy corn merchant from Cork.

The museum's job is now to preserve the conveyance documentation in line with Museum Accreditation Standards.