Llandrindod Wells & District U3A Lecture Meeting October 2017

The Incredible Life of Dr William Price, a Welsh Surgeon

Report by Clive Barrett

The Chairman Berwyn Woolnough gave news of the lectures of other U3A groups in the area, plus the Mid Wales U3A quiz. He also mentioned local interest groups including film, visiting to Kew Gardens, theatre visit to Stratford upon Avon, railway, garden visiting, a geology field trip near Builth Wells, with another U3A, and finally the Christmas lunch. He then introduced the guest speaker Dean Powell from Llantrisant, who has lectured and written books on Victorian history, and the subject of his talk " The Incredible Life of Dr. William Price, a Welsh Surgeon. In his lecture Dean traced comprehensively and often humorously Dr. William Price's life from 1800 to 1893, which was as the title suggests incredible by any standards. During his life he was an arch druid, an eccentric publican, and from his originally successful family he got involved in iron works and blast furnaces. Dr. Price despite his difficult upbringing was a bright scholar, showing remarkable promise to be a fully fledged surgeon, he became concerned with the impact of industrialization and the social consequences on South Wales miners and factory workers.

He then went to London where there were epidemics, and became an apprentice in operating theatres. By the time he was 21 he was a very well qualified doctor, but London was not for him so he returned to South Wales settling in Pontypridd. There 24 year old Dr. Price was involved in an iron works and another company as a surgeon for 50 years. He was a vegetarian, involved in bone setting and skin grafting … life style choices way before his time. Then he wanted to discover knowledge, studied Welsh history and lectured about ancient Britain, including druidism, bards, and Eistedfordi. At the time Wales as a nation had an inferiority complex, and he proposed building Wales first National Museum but this failed. Dr. Price then became involved with the social reformist Chartists Movement, and their leader John Frost. He became leader of the South Wales Chartists, and was known as militant with pistols, but he quarreled with Frost prior to and over the Newport uprising. Despite not actually going to Newport there was a bounty of 100(pounds) on his head. So he settled in Paris, at the time Dr.Price had some sort of mental breakdown, possibly because of his recent failures with the National Museum and Chartists. He then threw himself into the research of Greek mythology, where he believed bardic traditions began. Further at the time he believed that the Welsh would rise again, and that his future son would be the born leader. He founded Wales first social health care system, was involved in druidism, and also a successful medical doctor.

Possibly his medical career was understated. |Dr. Price operated on a friend's wife saving mother and baby. He crammed so much into his lifetime, further evidence of this was he studied the British legal system, defended himself in court and was a definite lefty, being a friend of Karl Marx, incredibly outspoken he also represented miners and workers. In 1871 he returned to South Wales, but a second bid to found a National Museum near the rocking stones Pontypridd failed, and he was involved in tin plate and factory works in Llantrisant, which at the time was a mean and dirty town. As a doctor he was as busy as ever, then 83 he met Gwenllian Llewellyn, she was 24, he agreed to marry her, they had daughters but wanted a son, but when he arrived he died after only five months. Dr. Price

wanted a druid cremation, not wanting to pollute the earth with corpses. He illegally cremated his son on a nearby hill, was brought to an incredible trial … found not guilty.

When he died his wife arranged for his body to lie in state, and proved she was an entrepreneur in her own right, because she sold tickets for the cremation service!!!!! I thought that the speaker Dean Powell delivered the lecture excellently, was very funny at times, bringing in light hearted comments without pausing, before continuing smoothly with his talk. At the end the speaker who answered questions from members, was thanked by Chairman Berwyn, who described his talk as very informative and professional. As one member said when leaving the meeting "That was a brilliant lecture".