

The History of the Grangetown Local History Society



The Society began with a few like-minded people with a love of Grangetown and who had lived there or were still living there. They were Betty Casella, Celina (Dolly) King, Ray Shaw and Rita Spinola, who got together in 1995 with the common aim of recording the history of the area.



In 1996, Eileen Breslin (top right in the picture) was appointed chairman with Ian Clarke as secretary. Ray Shaw is to her left with Rita and Ian below. It was not long before enough information had been gathered to be able to publish the first book: 'Grangetown', written by Barbara Jones, in 1996.

The constitution of the Society not only had specific aims concerning the research of the area's history but also allowed for support of the local community and the promotion of education in that history. This included watching over planning applications for changes to Grangetown's character and included campaigns for improvements to it. The reinstatement of the Grange Gardens bandstand and drinking fountain were but two such successful campaigns. Children

from the local school were involved in burying a time capsule within the new bandstand.



The new fountain is shown in the photograph, with Eileen Breslin, Peter Ranson and Rita Spinola.



In effect, the group felt so protective of Grangetown that they in some ways became its guardian, pushing for improvements and resisting damaging planning

proposals. Such improvements involved projects not only well within the area but on its edges too, such as the creation of the Grangemore Park, a name proposed by Eileen.

This involved the covering of an old tip and its planting and wilding. Art works were added to it, in the form of a large steel chain, whose links meet at the summit, the end of each link carrying a bronze plaque illustrating numerous elements associated with the area, many of which were designed by Grangetown residents including school children.

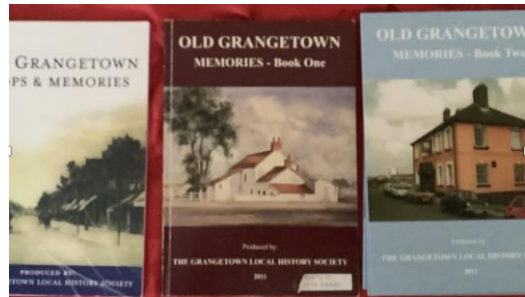
We can see that right from the beginning, the Society would not be an insulated academic group, but one fully at the centre of Grangetown's life. And so it has continued. This strong sense of social interaction means that the members are also friends, so that the meetings of the Society are distinguished by the constant reinforcing of relationships, often long-held ones.

From the beginning, everyone was very aware that any research being done was only of value if read by others. To this end, annual calendars were printed containing historic photographs of Grangetown and the money raised helped the work of the

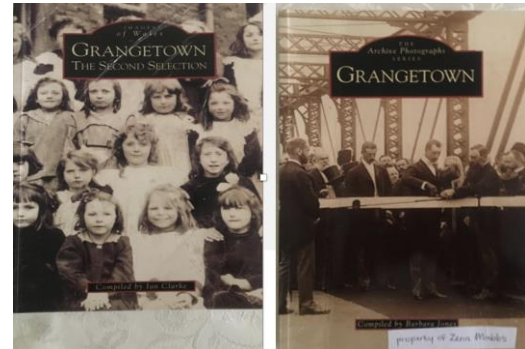


Society. Books of reminiscences were also published (see below), and aural recordings made of the memories of the oldest people in the area, which is a unique and valuable archive.

Talks to schools and other educational establishments, such as the university and the University of the Third Age have also taken place, together with exhibitions of the Society's work. A particularly successful one being held in the old Central Library. Examples of books produced by the Society are shown here. An image of the very first calendar is also shown.



In 2008, a new chairman, Zena Mabbs was elected. Already a keen student of history, Zena launched many a research project, ensuring the continuing legacy of her predecessor.



The Society also faced challenges, not least of all the need to find a new venue for meetings. Thus far, the old Grangetown Library had proved the perfect setting for its meetings, but with

its closure and the construction of its replacements as a so-called 'hub', meetings moved to the new premises. But the new hub proved not to be a place of study and calm and it became clear that the presence of the Society and its several filing cabinets of archives was not sympathetically understood. A move to the much more spacious and very supportive Glamorgan Archives building was a welcome new home, which it continues to be. The staff, especially, are very understanding and supportive. So much so, that the Society's archive has been donated to them and is being conserved and made accessible to the public.

Zena recognised early on that the Society had to take advantage of new technology. The first innovation was the creation of a web site under the expert hands of Steve Duffy who remains the web master. The site offers a comprehensive and up to date reference not only to the current activities of the Society (minutes of meetings, announcements of forthcoming events, etc) but is also a reference, much used by visitors so the site, for finding information from sources such as the Society's Fact Sheets which are the result of various research projects. From the enquiries received from all corners of the globe, it is known to be well used. (It can be found at www.grangetownhistory.co.uk)

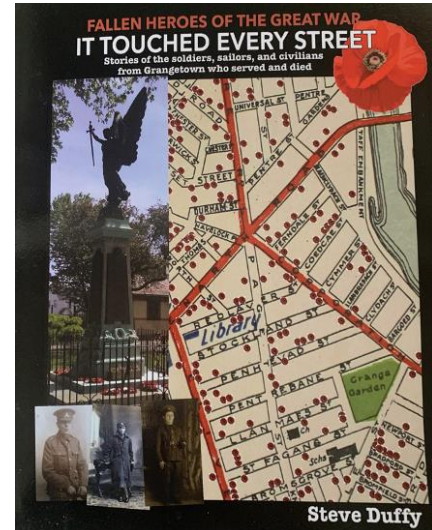


The last few years have been notable for two large projects covering both world wars. It was recognised that the list of names on the war memorial in Grange Gardens was incomplete. For both wars, research into the fallen was undertaken, resulting in hundreds of additional names being added and memorial stones added to the monument to mark this omission. A book entitled, "It Touched Every Street" by Steve Duffy was published which covered WW2.

For WW1, a grant was obtained for research into the names and addresses of every soldier who fell in the Great War and postcards were produced, each with his or her name on them. A postcard with these details was then posted at the houses where they once lived, so that the current residents would know the history of the house and of those who made the ultimate sacrifice. Many householders placed the cards in their windows for passers-by to read and learn. The scheme was well received and obtained glowing reports in the press for the unusual idea by Steve.

The amount of work involved in these projects cannot be exaggerated. They were monumental exercises in very detailed and thorough research. Not only were the names of the fallen verified, but their family history was researched together with where they lived and where they fell. www.grangetownwar.co.uk provides the most comprehensive guide for anyone wishing to know the personal history and wartime history of those who died.

A steadily growing digital archive was arising and means had to be found to not only safely store items such as digital photographs, but also provide a means of members viewing them. Accordingly, a Dropbox storage and retrieval system was introduced which now has a large volume of digitised material. This includes not only scanned and photographed items but photographs of old Grangetown and Cardiff that came available. In due course, it is intended that this archive too will join the Glamorgan Archive's collection of similar material thus making it also available to the public.



It should not be thought that the Society does nothing but research; annual outings to places of interest and Christmas parties also take place, thus reinforcing the social links that bind members.



In 2015, a new chairman Doug Knight was chosen. His election coincided with the first comprehensive cataloguing of our extensive archive by Brenda John. Here, Doug is presenting her with a gift from the Society for her exceptional work.

Further books have been published under the authorship of some members and below is shown a collection of them.

It is clear that the original ambitions of the founding members of the Society continue to be fulfilled: that of a regular meeting of friends who continue to not only document, but also to spread abroad, the history of Grangetown and to protect its unique characteristics.

