

SAUNDERSFOOT AND DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

At its October meeting the Society welcomed Dr. Robert Llewellyn Davies to give an illustrated lecture on 'Slebech and the Knights Hospitallers'

The Slebech estate occupies a strategic site at the confluence of the eastern and western Cleddau and its history is closely associated in the middle ages with the Knights Hospitallers. The Order of the Knights of the Hospital of St. John or the Order of St. John was formed at the time of the first Crusade as a charitable organisation to support pilgrims to the Holy Land through tending the sick and wounded and in the provision of food, drink and shelter but by 1118 a military obligation had been added to their role.

The Order's connection with Slebech, and west Wales generally, dates from the early twelfth century with the granting of extensive lands in central Pembrokeshire, though whether by a Fleming called Wizo or by his son Walter or possibly his grandson, another Walter, is open to question. Over time further grants of land, not only in Pembrokeshire but on the Gower peninsular and as far north as Llanrhystud, saw the Order's Slebech Commandery become their most extensive in Wales. Their church of St. John with its connected buildings would also have been a resting place for the many pilgrims travelling to the shrine of St. David, and no doubt led to further bequests.

The Order's close association with the area came to an abrupt end in 1546 and the dissolution of the monasteries. The Crown claimed their lands and the Slebech estate was sold to the Barlow family for £705. The Barlows held the estate for some two hundred years, building the present house, marrying into local gentry families and involving themselves in local affairs. The Barlows fade from the scene in the eighteenth century and the estate passed, often briefly, through the hands of a number of families: Symmons, Knox, Phillips and de Rutzen, the latter constructing Blackpool mill and the nearby bridge around 1830.

Our speaker was warmly thanked on behalf of the Society by Mrs. Ann Einon for an informative and engaging lecture. Members are reminded that this year's Christmas Party will be held at the Gower Hotel on 13 December commencing at 7.00 pm. The price will be £16.95 per person.