

“The Guiding Light” - Leslie Williams, 1931-37

Making its appearance on the bookstall at Brecon Show last year was "The Guiding Light" by Leslie Williams, first published in 2005 to celebrate the 25th Anniversary of the Breconshire Agricultural Society. Impressively produced in hard cover and on superior paper, its contents are structured and expressed in very readable form. Born in 1919 at Arbercynnig Mill, the family home for over 100 years, he was the nephew of another Old Boy, the eminent Professor William Rees KStJ, MA DSC FSA FR History Society, historian and cartographer.

Presently a centenarian of several years Leslie, as an Old Boy, is the “Father of the House.” First and foremost a highly respected farmer through his diverse achievements, Leslie promoted the interests of his native area. However, during World War II he served with the RAF (VR) as a flight-lieutenant navigator in bomber command taking part in over 30 operations. Settling back to farming, undertaking a whole range of official roles within the industry and public life generally, as a Nuffield scholar he undertook a study of agricultural practice in the Low Countries and Scandinavia. A board member of the RWAS he played a significant role in the establishment of a home for the Royal Welsh at Llanelwedd in 1962. Brecon Show has also been high on his priority list; he was its president in 1977. Llanelwedd became the permanent home of this Show from 1982, with Leslie becoming one of the Show Site Trustees. As a dairy farmer he first showed Friesian Cattle at Brecon show in 1951. As a notable dairy farmer, he served as a representative on the Milk Marketing Board and on NFU committees and the CAEC (County Agricultural Executive Committee).

Leslie was appointed a magistrate in 1971 becoming a member of the Probation and After-care Committee of the Brecon Bench. In 1959 he began broadcasting a series of programs for BBC radio called "From the Farm", a diary of events in the agricultural calendar. The feedback from listeners was such that he was invited by the BBC to present the first agricultural TV programme from Wales, from Ffostill, Talgarth. His producer at the BBC in Cardiff, Hillary Phillips, described Leslie's style as having "a very nice air of informed informality". He became Wales' favourite voice of farming.

An avid reader and writer, his special delight is cooking. Leslie is a man known for his love and respect for the area he has lived in all his life and the traditions of its heritage. He was at one stage Governor of Brecon High School and the former Coleg Howell Harris. Interestingly, when pressed for any regret he admitted that it was his inability to speak Welsh. All things considered Leslie Williams ranks as one of the most remarkable, though so modest, Old Boy.

Glyn Powell