

H.M. Stanley the Scramble for Africa

Members of the Denbigh and District Probus Club enjoyed another wonderful lunch at the Oriel Hotel, St Asaph at their meeting on Monday 3rd June. The speaker after lunch was Helen Papworth who gave a talk titled H.M. Stanley and the Scramble for Africa.

After a career in education in Wales, Helen went to Ethiopia for 2 years in 2004 as a volunteer advisor with the Ministry of Education in Addis Ababa. In 2008, after studying children's publishing in Wrexham for two years, she returned to Addis Ababa in 2008 to help the Ministry produce Civics textbooks. In 2012 she gained a PhD in Critical and Creative Writing in Bangor completing her research on Ethiopian children's literature. She then made frequent trips to Ethiopia for several years and worked with publishers of children's books.

After completing her PhD, she began to learn more about Henry Morton Stanley and his African exploits that started in Ethiopia and started her research into Dorothy Tennant and H.M. Stanley with visits to the archives in Belgium leading to her writing a factual novel about Stanley and Dolly called *The Butterfly and the Bee*.

She first gave this talk to an Ethiopian conference in 2018 to mark 150 years following the death of the Emperor Theodros and the Napier Expedition. Stanley had followed that Expedition as a 'Yankee' journalist despite the fact that he had been born in Denbigh as John Rowlands and brought up in St Asaph workhouse. He had moved to Liverpool and then sailed to America after a difficult childhood. Having received a reasonable education in the workhouse, he became a journalist for Mid-Western newspapers in his early twenties.

In 1867 he heard about the expedition to Ethiopia and approached James Gordon Bennett Junior, the editor of the New York Herald for funding, promising to send them regular articles about the expedition. The Napier Expedition, led by Sir Robert Napier, was organised in 1867 following the imprisonment by Emperor Theodros of Abyssinia of a number of Europeans including Charles Duncan Cameron, the British consul.

Stanley offered to fund the trip himself himself provided he could have a job with the New York Herald when he returned. In January 1868, he arrived in Suez having asked the telegraph office in Alexandria to get his stories out before all the others. Travelling with 2 horses and a servant, Stanley, as a journalist, wrote what people wanted to hear even hinting that it was a plan for the British to take over the country!

By Easter Sunday in Magdala, Emperor Theodros's mountain fortress, he saw he was losing the battle and took his own life, shooting himself with one of the pistols gifted to him by Queen Victoria. Stanley sent the story back to New York just before the cable between Alexandria and Malta broke. He got the scoop he wanted.

Theodros's only son Alemayehu, was taken back to Britain. Sadly, the boy's mother died en-route to Britain so he became a ward of Queen Victoria. Alemayehu died at a young age in Leeds and he is buried in Windsor Castle.

After Magdala, Stanley was sent by the New York Herald to cover events in Europe and Asia until 1871 when he was sent to discover David Livingstone which he succeeded in doing. After Livingstone died in 1873, Stanley returned to Africa to finish the exploration of the source of the Nile funded by the New York Herald and the Telegraph. He returned west finding a route along the Congo River. Stanley always thought that Britain should have taken over the Congo however Britain refused.

King Leopold of the Belgians recruited Stanley who, controversially, went back to Africa to help found the Free State of the Congo. By 1885 the Berlin Conference had taken place with every country invited, apart from Africans and the Boers. The outcomes of the conference were the free navigation of the Congo and the Niger rivers and free trade on the Congo with formalities to be observed for the valid annexation of territory in future on the African continent. The 'Scramble' began with Germany and Britain giving Leopold most of the Congo basin to prevent it falling into French hands.

Stanley became a British citizen again, granted to him by Queen Victoria when he had American citizenship. In Britain he became an MP.

Like Livingstone, Stanley saw the future of Africa in commerce and religion. He became one of the best explorers and he wrote all about it in his books. It must be remembered that many of the things Stanley wrote were embellished - after all, he was a journalist!

Helen now studies ecology and practices permaculture on her acre of land but she continues to research Welsh history and art and is currently preparing a talk on Bodelwyddan Castle.

The next Denbigh and District Probus Club meeting will be on Monday July 1st when Wendy Grey-Lloyd will talk about Thomas Howell - The legend and the legacy.

New members are always warmly welcomed.

For further information have a look at the club web site

denbighprobus.com or contact the Membership Officer Andrew Faulkner for more details prior to an introductory visit to a Probus meeting.

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