

## **Participant 5: Robert Jakes**

### **Location 1: The Pembroke Town Trail**

So the Pembroke Town Trail was a project to do with Pembrokeshire County Council in 2007, so it was some time ago, and it was working with what was then six schools in Pembroke Dock – I think they've only got one now, maybe you could count two. But anyway, I went around all the schools and talked with the children, and we talked about the heritage of the dockyard. I'd compiled a lot of old pictures of things there, and information about the docks. Then they did drawings, and we evolved this map, this trail of the town, where there's 39 bronze cast plaques set in the pavements of the dock, each with a children's drawing depicted on it of certain features in the dock. They were cast at a local bronze foundry in Clynderwen and then set in the pavement by the council. A guide was produced, but I don't know how many people have been around the trail. There was someone once who contacted me asking about certain number plaques, because he was going around with a dog that he called the 'Plaque Hound' and trying to find them all! But some are quite tucked away, and some are little bit out of the dock, if there was something interesting that I thought related to the dock.

### **Location 2: Plaque no. 3/ Buffalo Bill plaque**

There's been quite a lot of changes in Pembroke Dock as a town since this was done, because it was some years ago now: the main change is there's lots of supermarkets have come and built on a big area just outside the town centre. There's a kind of irony really, because one of these plaques was placed outside what is now a big Tesco's carpark, but it was a site of the Buffalo Bill Wild West Show many years ago, in 1903. I'll just read a little bit from the guide here: 'it's difficult to imagine that one of the greatest entertainers of the late 19th century visited the dockyard town, but Buffalo Bill certainly did! The spectacular Buffalo Bill Wild West Show was brought to this spot on May the 14th, 1903. The show, a massive tableau of the Wild West, contained over 500 horsemen. It began its performance with a procession from Pembroke railway station to this site and was led by William Cody, and attractions were the range of horsemanship featuring native American Indians, sharp shooting exercises, South American gauchos, Bedouin tribesmen and Russian Cossacks.' There's a kind of further irony now: since I took the picture, a couple of weeks ago, of what it looks like now where the plaque is located in the pavement, there was another school opposite there which was empty, a Victorian stone school called Llanion School, and that's just turned to a pile of rubble because they're having a Kentucky Fried Chicken built there! So it's kind of like, it's so changed. Originally when we did the trail there weren't any traffic lights in Pembrokeshire, and since then, when Tesco's was built, I think they paid for traffic lights there. So that's changed that area quite a bit, for better or worse.

### **Location 2: Plaque no. 39**

There was another plaque, number 39 outside the railway station, and if I could just read a little bit from the book again: 'Pembroke Dock railway station opened in 1864, offering a free ride to Tenby on its inaugural journey. The railway line cut through the town into the dockyard; a secondary spur leading to Hobbs Point followed in 1870s. Haggart, an early pioneer of film, in his 1908 film *The Life and Death of Charles Peace*, used the station as its main location. Not only was the film the first 'chase movie' ever made, predating the more famous 'Keystone Cops' films by a number of

years, it was also the first film to show a death scene. Based on a true story, the film was a huge sensation, and made the Hagger family very wealthy. The station is still operating, and its former office and waiting room have been transformed into a public house' – but actually that's just closed. Probably because of the current situation. But there's an interesting thing about Hagger as well. He's a pioneer of early films cinema – 'Arthur William Hagger, 1851 to 1925. He was a showman and fairground proprietor. He and his large family travelled throughout Britain bringing entertainment to the people. Here at station field, his electric bioscope, waxworks and theatrical shows regularly took place to entertain the people of Pembroke. His grandson Len Hagger later ran cinemas in Pembroke, Milford Haven, Cardigan, and Pembroke Dock.' Those old buildings still remain – empty. But when you look at the films, they're amazing – especially when you look at Pembroke Dock, and you look at the film, you see, 'look, it's here!' So it's quite interesting. His grandson – I don't know if he's still around, but he used to live in Tenby – he used to come round and give talks about it, and show the films to people, and talk about Hagger's cinema history, and it was a wonderful talk.

### **Location 3: Plaque no. 10/Air-Raid Shelter**

Number 10 on the trail is the air raid shelter sign – and that's something that perhaps not many people have noticed in the town, because it's a bit hidden really. In the guidebook, it says, 'the quaint building at the end of Commercial Road' – this is near the Market Hall, which is a whole story in itself – 'is an excellent example of an early 20th century shopfront. It was a backdrop for a number of scenes in the popular television program The Onedin Line.' And it's just got this fantastic frontage to it which hasn't changed, it's a bit like out of a museum. 'Next door to this old chemist stood Pembroke Dock's first bank, the Milford Haven Bank, and opposite, in the tree, there's this sign embedded in the tree of an arrow, which pointed to the air raid shelter, because there was a lot of bombing during the war. But this sign, this big arrow ... when we did the drawings of it, in 2007, for this trail, it was kind of half eaten around by the tree; but now, when I went back to just see it and look at the plaque again, the tree has grown around it even more, so it's just like a really small bit of the arrow showing and it won't be long till it's completely immersed inside this tree, which is quite interesting. We did do a project once, about the First World War in Pembroke Dock, and someone told me a story – but I can't quite believe it's true – but he was saying that he had a parrot in a cage, and there was a big blast from a bomb – I mean I can't believe this, but he said... the blast from the bomb pressed the cage around into the shape of the parrot! And I can't get my head around that, I'm not sure he's telling me the truth. I don't think the parrot was harmed – that's the thing! The parrot was fine! It's just like a coffin for it ... but anyway, we'll see.

### **Location 4: Plaque no. 18/Barrage Balloons**

There's another one, and that's number 18 on the trail, it says 'Barrage Balloons.' And there was a lot of bombing in the war, and the bombs hit these big oil tanks and there was a massive fire there. So they had to protect these reserves of fuel during the war, and they had all these big barrage balloons up in the sky. And there was a story I heard, when we were looking into it when we did the project, that one of these barrage balloons got loose. And it dragged its kind of wire rope thing across all these houses, just taking off the chimney pots as it went! And I just thought, what an amazing image. And it's quite interesting, because when you're working with children and you tell them certain stories, some you think are interesting and they don't, they

just think, 'yeah?' But actually other ones they kind of go, 'oh yeah! Can I draw that, can I draw that?!' So the project was a bit like that. For me, that kind of brought it alive a bit, because history can seem stale sometimes. So it was kind of interesting seeing which stories the kids picked up on and – and wanted to draw as well. There's an amazing image on the plaque number 23 as well, of the ferry boat, and it's across the river. I've heard another story about this, actually, since then – because I'm doing this map of the area for this project now, I've just heard of a smuggling story that involves this same crossing point. On the Pembroke River, there's a little village, Bentlass, on one side, and across to Pennar. And there was a ferry boat service where someone rowed people across. And the story that's on the little guide book for plaque number 23, it says that the Bentlass to Pennar ferry boat service was a major way for farmers' wives to bring their produce to market in Pembroke Dock, and the workers who lived on the other side of the Pembroke River also used it. 'Tragedy struck in 1889, when the ferry sank and all nine people on board were drowned. The ferryman, John Jones, and his young assistant were returning with seven women on board who had visited the market, and the waters had been choppy and the tide was ebbing against a strong wind. The inquest verdict was that the deceased and those with them met their deaths by accidental upsetting of the boat. There's this other story – there's another little beach that's near where I am, further south near Stackpole, Newquay beach, it's like a smuggler's beach. And there was supposed to be this 'king of the smugglers' who was captured there by the customs excise people, and he managed to slip away and get across land to this crossing at Bentlass, to try and get across, with them chasing him. And apparently, I think, they obviously shot and injured him in the water, and he died. But there was a court case afterwards apparently, because the customs and excise were accused of actually just letting him drown, basically, and not saving him. Because he was just shot in the leg, you know, they could have saved him, but I think they just let him let him drown. So they had a big court case about it, so that was interesting. It's really interesting when you go down to that bit of river, because at low tide, it just looks like a stream and mud, but I think at high tide it's a navigable river. And in the past I've heard, since looking into this a bit more, that pirate ships used to come up there and moor up by Pembroke Castle to sell their wares! So it was quite a big, you know, it's a big river when it's full tide, but it goes down to quite a little stream. But it can obviously be hazardous on the crossing.

#### **Location 5: Plaque no. 32/Pater Hall**

Number 32 is Pater Hall, and it's got this lovely drawing of an old key on the plaque. And it's said – the story we we found – was that it was built on the site of the town's temperance hall. This is one thing we found with this project, there are a lot of chapels. And one street, Front Street I think, apparently had seven pubs - it's only a little tiny street, but it's on the front! But anyway, this was built on the site of the temperance hall, and was destroyed by bombing during World War 2. And it's said that when the bombs exploded, the main doors of the building flew out, and its ornate key was discovered in Front Street, so that's quite a long way away. So just the thought of this key flying all the way across the town and landing on the street at the front, you know, by the water sort of thing, was an amazing image which also, you know, captured the children's imagination a bit, which was nice.

#### **Location 6: Plaque no. 12/Flying Boats**

There is a plaque number 12, that's about these big flying boats that used to be moored in the Haven. Then I think it was a storm one night and one of them sunk. And so they've been trying to bring it up again, and they've brought bits of it up. And there's this museum, a big heritage museum that's got a lot of this in it, which is really interesting. It's like a giant ... it's half boat half plane. So I guess they take off and land in water. The pictures are amazing actually – there's some nice old footage of them landing and taking off.

#### **Location 7: Plaque no. 11/Garrison Chapel**

I'm sort of rediscovering things rereading this now! There was one, this chapel at plaque number 11, and it says that there's a bell that was captured from a Spanish cruiser, and then that became the Garrison theatre and then a motor museum, and then 'falling into disrepair' – but actually, I think that's where the Sunderland Museum is, the Garrison Chapel. But I've got confused now, because there are a lot of chapels in Pembroke Dock...

#### **Location 8: Plaque no. 15/Pater Church**

The Pater church is quite interesting as well. That's a 13th century building, and it's probably the oldest buildings in Pembroke Dock – because I don't think there was really anything in Pembroke Dock before the Navy came and built the dockyard there. Or very little, which is weird because it's such a big harbour. It's like a tower, but it was once owned by the Knights of Saint John of Jerusalem, and there's an old burial ground next to the tower. And I thought I remembered something about how the skeletons were all aligned with Mecca or something – but I'm getting confused with all these stories now! I'm going to have to have a disclaimer, because none of this might be true!

#### **Location 9: Plaque no. 9/The Gun Tower**

It was quite a funny thing when I was looking at this book: the trail guide was a collaboration with a local actor/writer, Dave Ainsworth. And I was reading one bit about the Gun Tower, which is just off – well there's a couple of gun towers. It's so heavily fortified, the docks, because they didn't want anyone attacking it. I'm just trying to find it on here now. It was an amazing museum! Number nine, so the gun tower. Oh, it's different in the guide to what I've said, because ... yeah, that's interesting. The guide also has – he worked with some of the children and wrote poems and things, and they put them in this guidebook too, for each plaque. So he puts it slightly differently to what I've gone on the website, he said – he's quite humorous, David, and he said the one on Front Street, there's only seven in the world – of which seven are to be found in the Haven. So they were all built next to each other!

#### **Location 10: Plaque no. 1/Library**

The number one plaque is outside the library, so that is the starting point of the trail. In theory, people can get the book out, for free, go around the trail, and put the book back in the library! Okay, let's just see if what David's written is different to what I've written: so plaque number one, which is the start of the trail, is just right outside the library, in the middle of Pembroke Dock. 'The library, which was built on land which was once tidal, opened in 1987 in Water Street. The road that separates the library and the police station was once called Shore Street,' – so basically that was, you know, the beach in the past – 'a reminder of the extent of the original tidal pill, which

that area would be called. It was here that many ships were built, including the merchant ship *The Carmarthenshire*, which was constructed in 1865. It was the first such ship to enter the Japanese harbour of Yokohama: as well as its cargo of Cardiff Coal, the ship carried with it the first Western females to be seen by the Japanese population. Soon after the captain's wife and his daughter set foot on land, images of European fashions appeared on a range of oriental tableware.' And interestingly that does link with that recent video of the person and the ginkgo tree being planted in Pembroke Dock, which links with Japan.

#### **Location 11: Plaque no. 4/Military Cemetery**

Okay, so the plaque number four, it says in the guide book: 'few people realise it's the only military cemetery in Wales,' – and this could have changed since this was done – 'it was the last resting place of servicemen and their relatives who were killed or died while serving in the garrison town. Concealed within the Llanion housing estate, this really is one of Pembroke Dock's hidden treasures.' One particular thing there: there's a row of 17 graves towards the south of the graveyard, and these are the graves of 'soldiers who died in an accidental explosion while practising the techniques of disarming mines. The incident occurred in April 1942, and the men killed were nine royal engineers, four men from the King's Own Scottish Borderers, and four who were serving with the Pioneer Corps. An incredible footnote was that one officer escaped certain death that day, when he chose to leave the tragic scene to answer the telephone.' And everyone was killed except him, which was quite tragic.

#### **Location 12: Millennium Falcon Hangar**

It was quite exciting really, because they found all these old things to do with the time when it was filmed there – and it was supposed to be this really big secret thing, that they were building this massive great film prop in there for Star Wars. And – typical Pembroke Dock! – you couldn't keep anything quiet, you know, especially building a massive great spaceship in the docks. So there was a code word: I think it was called 'Code Word Magic Roundabout.' And so they re-enacted this, and they made a shop like how it used to be then, and everyone in the film was dressing up in those clothes, and the kids had 'Chopper' bicycles. And there was this thing where these children, sort of playing detectives really, managed to find that there was this big spaceship being made – which obviously has become even more famous, because I suppose it's come back to life in the more recent Star Wars movies. How they managed to get it out of there without people noticing, that's the thing I can't imagine! Maybe in pieces? But there are a lot of local people who worked on it, and they were all sworn to secrecy and everything like that, but I think maybe word got around at the time! But that was in one of the big old hangers which would have been, yeah, probably where they had the Sunderland airplanes in the past – which would have been a massive space which wouldn't have been used for anything at that time. So a film company, you know, would be quite interested in renting it, I guess, in a far away place like this, to hopefully do it secretly. And in fact, they did a wonderful sort of premiere of the film in the hall in Pembroke Dock, and showed the film, and invited all the people involved and everything, it was a real community thing. So the people were there who'd worked on it, and their families and everything. It was absolutely amazing.

#### **Location 13**

It's been quite a long time since the trail was done. And I think it was a big thing to find out – because it's so rich in stories, Pembroke Dock, and it was set out to sort of, you know, make that so that people would walk the streets and come across these things, and involve the community in the making of it, children anyway. But then it didn't have a big launch, or anything like that, so I think a lot of people are perhaps unaware that it's there. And the town council and things have attempted to revitalise it – I think they're doing that at the moment – but there's been so many changes and developments in Pembroke Dock, alongside the ones that haven't happened! There's always been big plans for the dock. But a lot of the history of it is still there to be seen, you know, a lot of the old buildings, and they haven't really changed much, you know – there's a massive great Market Hall. And some have been restored to their former glory. In a way, I hope people do seek it out, really, and find these. Some of them are in quite tucked away corners of the dock, you know, and pushing out into the surrounding fields a bit. But, you know, I think it's a nice little thing for people to follow up. If it doesn't get lost - I mean, I did see a picture of the one near this dock, the pickling dock, which they're planning to fill in. So there's a bit of debate about, you know, that that's a bit of history that might disappear because of new technologies coming in. So it's kind of got that contrast of things happening. But it's funny, because I was amazed to see the plaque itself was still there, because I thought it had gone years ago! So it was kind of nice to see it, and I kind of hope that in all these big developments the plaques don't just get cast aside, you know? And that they're placed somewhere there. It keeps you in touch with the heritage of it I suppose.