AN ACCOUNT OF THE LADIES OF LLANGOLLEN

AN ACCOUNT

OF THE

LADIES OF LLANGOLLEN.

BY THE LATE REV. J. PRICHARD. D.D.

PRICE TWO PENCE.

Printed and Published by H. Jones, at the Atmospheric Gas Printing Works, "Advertiser" Office, Llangollen.

AN ACCOUNT
OF THE
LADIES OF LLANGOLLEN

THE LATE REV. J. PRICHARD, D.D

LADY ELEANOR CHARLOTTE BUTLER AND MISS SARAH PONSONBY, OF PLAS NEWYDD

Lady Eleanor Butler and Miss Ponsonby were Irish ladies of rank and beauty, who loved each other with an affection so true that they could never bear the idea of the separation which the marriage of either would necessitate. They, therefore, resolved on lives of celibacy, and, refusing many handsome offers, fled from home. They were, however, overtaken and brought back to their respective relations. Many attempts were made to draw Miss Butler into marriage, but all were in vain. In a short time the ladies eloped again, each having a small sum with her; and it was said that, although Lady Eleanor arrived here in the natural aspect of a maid of 34, Miss Ponsonby accompanied her in the guise of a smart footman, in top boots and buskin breeches. It was about the year 1778 when these errant ladies visited Llangollen. While rambling along this charming locality, their eyes rested on a gentle eminence near the village, and there they resolved to fix their abode. They, accordingly, purchased the estate, built a new cottage on the site of the old one, laid out gardens, pleasure grounds, rural walks and bridges, by which they might enjoy the natural charms of this picturesque retreat. Their mode of life being very singular, and their costume still more so, they soon became noticed by the many travellers who passed through North Wales. The celebrated comedian Charles Mathews thus describes their appearance:—"As they are seated, there is not one point to distinguish them from men; the dresses and powdering of the hair, their well-starched neckcloths, the upper part of their habits (which they always wear, even at a dinner party) made precisely like men's coats, with regular black beaver hats, everything contributing to this semblance. To crown all, they had crop heads, which were rough, bushy, and white as snow."

Plas Newydd was built at the north-east end of a field called the *Maes*, and was, therefore, called *Penymaes*—The end of the Maes.

The ladies were, according to their means, charitable to the aged, sick, and infirm; and had been taught, by wisdom and experience, that the best way to help the poor labourer was by giving him employment. The workman, having precious commodities for the market of the world—

physical power, knowledge, and good common sense—that were of more value to society than gold or land, would, by being given an opportunity to use his capacities, be able to support himself and family, without losing his independence, and humbling himself to be a crouching beggar, producing no honey to the common hive. Although their farm had only thirteen acres of land—four of their own, and nine held as tenants, they kept a carpenter, a cowman, a man for all work on the farm, and in the hay-harvest an additional number of men and poor women; with two ladies' maids and three female servants in the house. By the help of these male hands, they made every inch of ground productive, and every hedge-fence and walk pleasant to the sight—well answering their end, and the house healthy, orderly, and comfortable. In employing the labouring class, they were as wise and praiseworthy as the Society of Friends.

We recollect another feature in the character of the Ladies of Penymaes,—their non-interference with the religion of their servants. They wished all to be religious, and possess the root of the matter. Though they were LADIES, they left conscience to be ruled by its rightful Owner; they followed the example of a certain German sovereign, who, when some of his courtiers advised him to compel all his subjects to be of the same religion as himself, replied, "I rule over the bodies of my faithful subjects; as touching the soul I am not their king, but a fellow-subject with them to the Great King, who *can* govern the soul, and has reserved conscience as His own sacred province." Lady Eleanor and the Honourable Miss Ponsonby knew too well that coercion might make people worthless hypocrites; but teaching the truth, a life consistent with the truth of God, with loving persuasion, only could make sincere followers of Him, who says, My son, give me *thine heart*.

Allow us to relate another incident in the lives of the Ladies of Llangollen that fell under our observation, under the following heading:—*Kindness creates kindness and liberality*. Mr. Thomas Jones, of Bachau Mill, and the minister of Penybryn Chapel were the collectors for the Bible Society through the township of Bachau, from year to year, for thirty years. Penymaes being in their district, the collectors called there as well as every other house in the township, and were received with a smile,

wishes of success, and a handsome subscription from the ladies' maids, Misses Elizabeth and Jane Hughes, and something from the other servants. Either Miss Jane or Miss Elizabeth would always present the collecting book to the ladies. But the book, for years, would be returned from the ladies' room, without anything to gladden the collectors' hearts. However, one year, Miss Jane said, with a double smile, and appearance of confidence on her face, "Please, I will take your book to Lady Eleanor and Miss Ponsonby." She soon returned with a yellow piece that did gladden the hearts of the collectors, and added, "You must be sure, every year, to call on the ladies." And so they did as long as the last of them remained on earth, and met with equal success and cheerfulness. The collectors had no clue to the welcome change at Penymaes, in collecting, for years after the death of Miss Ponsonby. In course of time, Miss June Hughes (now Mrs. Roberts, Ormonde Cottage, Berwyn Street,) was united in marriage to Mr. Edward Roberts, timber merchant, and attended the means of grace at Penybryn Chapel, and became a useful member there. When the minister of Penybryn was taking tea at her house, she asked him, "Do you remember the time you and Mr. Jones received the first half-sovereign for the Bible Society from the dear ladies!" "Yes, as it were yesterday, but we know not the cause of our success." "Well, I shall tell you. Do you remember Lady Eleanor's severe illness about two years before she died?" The minister replied, "I do, and shall never forget it." "You, therefore, remember your praying so earnestly for her, and for her recovery, that you, and many of the congregation, were moved to tears? Next day, someone, that was present at Penybryn, described at Plas Newydd the remarkable prayer, and its effects upon yourself and those present. When the ladies heard of the prayer they felt so much that they remembered the words of the Apostle James (chap. v. 16), 'The *effectual fervent* prayer of a righteous man availeth much.' And Lady Eleanor soon recovered, and was restored to her usual health: and both believed that the God of the Bible had saved her life, and restored her health, and determined, to the end of their days, to subscribe for the Bible; and so they did, as you know." The minister thanked Mrs. Roberts for the encouraging relation that revealed the secret of the collectors' success, on behalf of the British and Foreign Bible Society, at Plas Newydd.

Miss Seward, the clever and amusing gossip, says of the "ladies," whom she rhapsodizes as "the enchantreses" of Plas Newydd:—

"Lady Eleanor is of middle height, and somewhat beyond the *embonpoint* as to plumpness; her face round and fair, with the glow of luxuriant health. She has not fine features, but they are agreeable; enthusiasm in her eye, hilarity and benevolence in her smile. Exhaustless is her fund of historic and traditionary knowledge, and of everything passing in the present eventful period. She expresses all she feels with an ingenuous ardour, at which the cold-spirited beings stare. I am informed that both these ladies read and speak most of the modern languages. Of the Italian poets, especially of Dante, they are warm admirers. Miss Ponsonby, somewhat taller than her friend, is neither slender nor otherwise, but very graceful. Easy, elegant, yet pensive, is her address and manner.

"Her voice, like lovers' watched, is kind and low."

"A face rather long than round, a complexion clear but without bloom, with a countenance which, from its soft melancholy, has a peculiar interest. If her features are not beautiful, they are very sweet and feminine. Though the pensive spirit within permits not her lovely dimples to give mirth to her smile, they increase its sweetness, and, consequently, her power of engaging the affections. We see, through her veil of shading reserve, that all the talents and accomplishments which enrich the mind of Lady Eleanor exist, with equal powers, in this her charming friend."

The celebrated Madame de Genlis, in an entertaining miscellany, under the title of "Souvenirs de Felicie L—," has given the following graphic narrative of "The Fair Recluses of Llangollen:"—

During my residence in England, nothing struck me so much as the delicious cottage of Llangollen, in North Wales. It is not a little extraordinary, that a circumstance, so singular and remarkable, as that connected with this retreat, should hitherto have escaped the notice of all modern travellers. The manner in which I became acquainted with it was this:—During our long stay at Bury, a small company of five or six persons, including ourselves, met every evening from seven till half-past

ten o'clock. We diverted ourselves with music and conversation, so that the time passed very agreeably. One night, friendship happened to be the subject of conversation, and I declared that I would with pleasure undertake a long journey to see two persons who had long been united by the bonds of genuine friendship. 'Well, madam,' replied Mr. Stuart (now Lord Castlereagh), 'go to Llangollen; you will there see a model of perfect friendship, which, will afford you the more delight, as it is exhibited by two females who are yet young and charming in every respect. Would you like to hear the history of Lady Eleanor Butler and Miss Ponsonby?'—'It would give me the greatest pleasure.'—'I will relate it to you.' At these words the company drew nearer to Mr. Stuart, we formed a little circle round him, and after recollecting himself a few moments, he thus began his narrative:—

'Lady Eleanor Butler was born in Dublin. She was left an orphan while in her cradle; and possessing an ample fortune, together with an amiable disposition and a beautiful person, her hand was solicited by persons belonging to the first families in Ireland. At an early age she manifested great repugnance to the idea of giving herself a master. This love of independence, which she never dissembled, did no injury to her reputation; her conduct has always been irreproachable, and no female is more highly distinguished for sweetness of temper, modesty, and all the virtues which adorn her sex. In early life a mutual attachment took place between her and Miss Ponsonby, by an accident, which made a deep impression on their imagination. They had no difficulty to persuade themselves that heaven had formed them for each other; that is, that it had designed each of them to devote her existence to the other, so that they might glide together down the stream of life, in the bosom of peace, the most intimate friendship, and delicious independence. This idea their sensibility was destined to realize. Their friendship gradually grew stronger with their years, so that when Miss Ponsonby was seventeen, and Lady Eleanor Butler thirty-four, they mutually engaged never to sacrifice their liberty, or to part from each other. From that moment they formed the design of withdrawing from the world, and of settling for good in some sequestered retreat. Having heard of the charming scenery of Wales, they secretly absconded from their friends for the purpose of

fixing upon their future residence. They visited Llangollen, and there, on the summit of a hill, they found a little detached cottage, with the situation of which they were delighted. Here they resolved to form their establishment. Meanwhile the guardians of the young fugitives sent people after them, and they were conveyed back to Dublin. They declared that they would return to their hill as soon as they were free. Accordingly, when Miss Ponsonby was twenty-one, in spite of the entreaties and remonstrances of their relatives and friends, they quitted Ireland for ever, and flew to Llangollen. Miss Ponsonby is not rich, but Lady Eleanor possesses a considerable fortune. She purchased the little hut and the property of the hill, where she built a cottage, very simple in external appearance, but the interior of which displays the greatest elegance. On the top of the hill she has formed about the house a court and flower-garden; a hedge of rosebushes is the only enclosure that surrounds this rural habitation. A convenient carriage-road, the steepness of which has been diminished by art, was carried along the hill. On the aide of the latter some ancient pines of prodigious height were preserved; fruit trees were planted, and a great number of cherry trees in particular, which produce the best and finest cherries in England. The two friends likewise possess a farm for their cattle, with a pretty farm-house and a kitchen-garden close by. In this sequestered abode, these two extraordinary persons, with minds equally cultivated, and accomplishments equally pleasing, have now resided ten years, without ever having been absent from it a single night. Nevertheless, they are not unsociable; they sometimes pay visits to the neighbouring gentry, and receive, with the greatest politeness, travellers on their way to or from Ireland, who are recommended to them by any of their old friends.'

This account strongly excited my curiosity, and produced the same effect on Mademoiselle d'Orleans and my two young companions. We determined the same night to set out immediately for Llangollen, by the circuitous route of Brighton, Portsmouth, and the Isle of Wight. It was the latter end of July when we arrived at Llangollen. This place has not the rich appearance of the English villages in general, but nothing can equal the cleanliness of the houses, and among the lower classes of any country this is an infallible proof of abundance. Llangollen, surrounded

with woods and meadows, clothed with the freshest verdure, is situated at the foot of the hill belonging to the two friends, which there forms a majestic pyramid covered with trees and flowers. We arrived at the cottage, the only object of our journey, an hour before sunset.

The two friends had received in the morning by a messenger the letter which Mr. Stuart had given me for them. We were received with a grace, a cordiality, and kindness, of which it would be impossible for me to give any idea. I could not turn my eyes from those two ladies, rendered so interesting by their friendship and so extraordinary on account of their way of life. I perceived in them none of that vanity which takes delight in the surprise of others. Their mutual attachment, and their whole conduct evince such simplicity, that astonishment soon gives way to softer emotions; all they do and say breathes the utmost frankness and sincerity. One circumstance which I cannot help remarking is, that after living so many years in this sequestered retreat, they speak French with equal fluency and purity. * * * An excellent library, composed of the best English, French, and Italian authors, affords them an inexhaustible source of diversified amusement and solid occupation; for reading is not truly profitable except when a person has time to read again.

The interior of the house is delightful on account of the just proportion and distribution of the apartments, the elegance of the ornaments and furniture, and the admirable view which you enjoy from all the windows; the drawing-room is adorned with charming landscapes, drawn and coloured from nature, by Miss Ponsonby. Lady Eleanor is a great proficient in music; and their solitary habitation is filled with embroidery, by them both, of wonderful execution. Miss Ponsonby, who writes the finest hand I ever saw, has copied a number of select pieces in verse and prose, which she has ornamented with vignettes and arabesques, in the best taste, and which form a most valuable collection. Thus the arts are cultivated there with equal modesty and success, and their productions are admired with a feeling that is not experienced elsewhere; the spectator observes with delight that so much merit is secure in this peaceful retreat from the shafts of satire and envy.

There are several little reminiscences of the Ladies of Penymaes to be gleaned from the few remaining old residents, such as their habit of distributing sixpenny pieces on Sunday mornings on their way to Church, which was always down Butler's Hill and along Church Street to the gate which formerly stood in the same street. Their influence was considered paramount, and very solicitous were the labouring classes and tradespeople for their patronage and countenance. During hay-harvest, the poor women of the village were wont to scrape a few pence for the purpose of buying a quart of beer for the mowers in the ladies' field, for the sake of their certain acknowledgment, and thereby causing a superfluity of drink to run during the ladies' harvest. The poor cottage gardeners of the neighbourhood used to vie with each other in being the first in tendering their earliest and finest vegetables to the ladies. The working tradesmen of the town would leave any work unfinished to attend to the building and other tastes of Miss Ponsonby.

They were deemed all-powerful intercessors with the magistracy and government. Many a mother has stood, twirling her apron, at that dark threshold, whilst recounting her sorrowful tale about her Will or Tom having got into a scrape, and consequent durance, and had her burden lightened by the sympathetic countenance of Lady Eleanor, being at the same time edified by the wholesome advice of Miss Ponsonby. Fancy recalls her lightened step and brightened face, as she turned away with the much-desired promise of their advocacy. Their influence proved sufficient even to save the life of one young man, who had been sentenced to death for forgery. Their qualities were such that their whole lives were spent in performing worthy deeds. Good actions, like sweet herbs, have a retentive perfume. May their memory be long cherished as virtuous exponents of that paternal and sympathetic life of the upper order which knits class to class, and has a strong, refining influence on the poor and lowly.

On June 2nd, 1829, death severed the faithful friendship which had existed for so many years between the eccentric residents at Plas Newydd, by removing from this earthly scene Lady Eleanor Butler, who had attained the advanced age of ninety. On December 9th, 1831, Miss Ponsonby also died. They are both buried in the Churchyard of

Llangollen, where a stone monument is erected to their memory. On this record of mortality are inserted the following memorials:—

Sacred to the Memory of
The Right Honourable
LADY ELEANOR CHARLOTTE BUTLER,
Late of Plas Newydd, in this Parish,
Deceased 2nd June, 1829,
Aged 90 Years,
Daughter of the Sixteenth, *Sister of the Seventeenth*
EARLS OF ORMONDE AND OSSORY;
Aunt to the late, and to the present
MARQUESS OF ORMONDE.

Endeared to her friends by an almost unequalled excellence of heart, and by manners worthy of her illustrious birth, the admiration and delight of a very numerous acquaintance from a brilliant vivacity of mind undiminished to the latest period of a prolonged existence. Her amiable condescension and benevolence secured the grateful attachment of those by whom they had been so long and so extensively experienced. Her various perfections, crowned by the most pious and cheerful submission to the Divine will, can only be appreciated where it is humbly believed they are now *enjoying their Eternal Reward, and by her, of whom for more than fifty years they constituted that happiness which, through our blessed Redeemer, she trusts will be renewed when* THIS TOMB *shall have closed over its* latest tenant.

"Sorrow not as others who have no hope."

1 *Thess.*, *chap.* 4, *v.* 13.

SARAH PONSONBY
Departed this Life
On the 9th December, 1831,
Aged 76.

She did not long survive her beloved companion, LADY ELEANOR BUTLER, with whom she lived in this valley for more than half a century of uninterrupted friendship. "But they shall no more return to their house, neither shall their place know them any more."—Job, chap. 7, *v.* 10.

Reader, pause for a moment and reflect, not on the uncertainty of human life, but, upon the certainty of its termination, and take comfort from the assurance that "As it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment: so Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for Him shall He appear the second time without sin unto salvation."—Heb., chap. 9, *v.* 27, 28.

On the same tombstone is also the following inscription, to the memory of a faithful servant, who accompanied "the ladies" from Ireland:—

In Memory of
MRS. MARY CARRYL,
Deceased 22*nd November*, 1809.

This Monument is erected by Eleanor Butler and Sarah Ponsonby, of Plas Newydd, in this Parish.

Released from earth and all its transient woes,
She whose remains beneath this Stone repose,
Steadfast in faith resigned her parting breath,
Looked up with Christian joy and smiled in
death. Patient, industrious, faithful, generous, kind,
Her conduct left the proudest far behind;
Her virtues dignified her humble birth,
And raised her mind above this sordid earth. Attachment (*sacred bond of grateful breasts*) *Extinguished but with life, this Tomb attests,*
Reared by two friends who will her loss bemoan,
Till with her ashes, here, shall rest their own.

THE LADIES OF LLANGOLLEN.

Once two young girls of rank and beauty rare,
Of features more than ordinary fair,
Who in the heyday of their youthful charms
Refused the proffer of all suitors' arms,
Lived in a cottage here rich carved in oak,
Though now long passed from life by death's grim stroke.
Plas Newydd's gardens then displayed much taste,
And nought about them e'er allowed to waste.
The umbrageous foliage of surrounding trees
Gave them a shelter from the stormy breeze,
Whilst in a snug retreat about south-west,
Was bird-cote placed as shelter for redbreast,
For sparrow, chaffinch, blackbird, or for thrush,
These ladies did not wish the cold to touch.
Then did all species of ferns abound
In every nook and corner of their ground,
Then none were known to come unto their door
That were not welcomed with kind words, or more.
These ladies to each other kind and true,
Around Llangollen's vale, like them were few.
E'en now I see them seated in yon chair,
In well-starched neckcloths, and with powdered hair,
Their upper habits just like men's they wore,
With tall black beaver hats outside their door;
To crown it all my muse would whisper low,
With hair cropped short, rough, bushy, white as snow.
They at death's summons, God's commands obeyed,
And were in fair Llangollen's churchyard laid,
As they through life together did abide,
E'en now in death they both lie side by side;
Of them remains nought save dark mould and sod,
Who loved their neighbours second to their God;
Sweet peace be theirs—by death to dust allied,
Through him who near a century was their Guide;

Beloved, respected by the world were they,
By all regretted when they passed away.

Plas Newydd was purchased by General Yorke, C.B., in 1876. He knew the Ladies intimately in his Eton school-boy days, and has saved their cottage from decay, and filled the rooms with antiquities and curiosities, and all persons express delight on leaving the grounds. In 1878–79 the General made an extensive new wing to the back of the house. He spends his summer months at this delightful retreat, and is becoming a general favourite in the town, imitating the old Ladies in his liberality and kindness. He takes great delight in carving, and much of his handi-work may be seen in and about the house. It is very fortunate that the property fell to the hands of the present proprietor, whose constant aim is to improve and keep it in the most perfect repair. May the gallant general be long spared to reside amongst us. He has been happy in the selection of Mr. Joseph Davies and his amiable wife Mrs. Davies to look after the place, who are most careful to keep everything in the house and grounds in proper trim, and most attentive and obliging to visitors, who are admitted daily, on payment of a small fee.

★ HISTORY. STORIES. DISCOVERY. ★

BOOKLYN.XYZ

CURATED EBOOKS & CULT CINEMA
FOR CURIOUS MINDS

HUNDREDS OF eBOOKS

Carefully selected public-domain books in history, literature, travel, philosophy, and more.

PDF & EPUB FORMATS
Compatible with all devices and eReaders.

100% FREE
No sign up. No fees.
Just quality books,
free to download forever.

CURATED WITH CARE
Quality over quantity.
Every title chosen for
its lasting value.

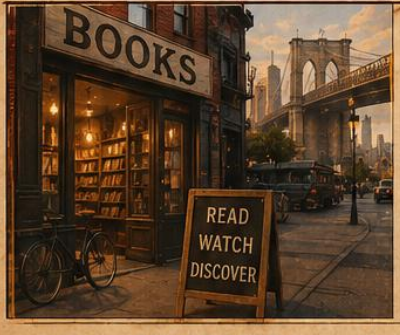
★ BOOKLYN'S CULT CINEMA ★

STRANGE. CLASSIC.
UNDERRATED. UNFORGETTABLE.

CULT FILMS
FROM THE
GOLDEN AGE
TO MIDNIGHT

PUBLIC DOMAIN FILMS • RARE GEMS • CULT FAVORITES
WATCH FREE. LEGALLY. FOREVER.

✦ GREAT BOOKS & GREAT FILMS. ALWAYS FREE. ✦



SCAN TO VISIT
← BOOKLYN.XYZ
AND START READING
& WATCHING TODAY!

NO FEES. NO LIMITS. JUST GREAT CONTENT.

KEEP HISTORY ALIVE.
SPREAD THE WORD.

BOOKS CONNECT US TO WHERE WE'VE BEEN.

GREAT STORIES NEVER GO OUT OF STYLE.

★ BOOKLYN.XYZ — YOUR LIBRARY. YOUR CINEMA. YOUR DISCOVERY. ★

Queerazon.com

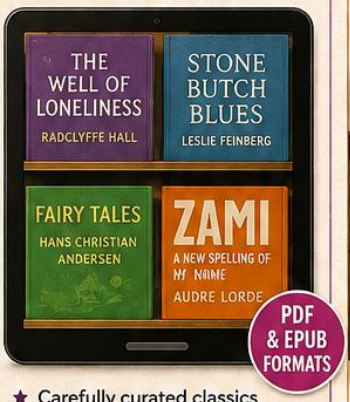
Your Queer Corner of the Internet

BOOKS. CINEMA. GIFTS. GEAR. PRIDE. ALL FOR YOU.

Queerazon.com is your joyful destination for LGBTQ+ books, cult cinema, exclusive gifts, and pride-filled treasures. From powerful reads to unforgettable films and unapologetically queer merch — everything here is chosen with love, community, and pride in mind.

FREE eBOOKS

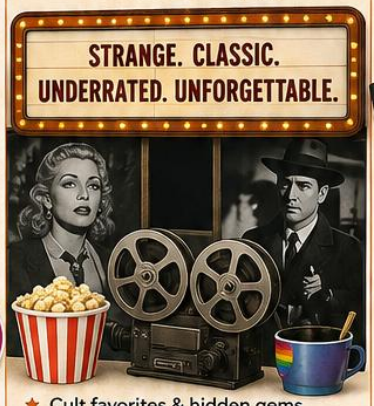
Hundreds of LGBTQ+ & queer-friendly classics, free to download.



- Carefully curated classics
- PDF & EPUB formats
- Yours to keep, forever
- No sign up. No fees. Just free books.

QUEERAZON CINEMA

Cult films. Classic gems. Queer stories on screen. Watch free. Legally.



- Cult favorites & hidden gems
- From the Golden Age to midnight movies
- Public domain & hand-picked films
- Watch anytime, anywhere

GIFTS & GEAR

Pride-filled finds for you or someone you love.

- Books, mugs, totes & more
- Pride and everyday wear
- Queer-owned. Queer-loved. Chosen with care.

Scan to Explore!

Queerazon.com

Books. Cinema. Pride. All for you.

Support Queer. Shop Queer. Stay Proud.

SAFE. AFFIRMING. 100% FABULOUS.

Discover the Past, One Piece at a Time

Rare stamps. Vintage ephemera. Curious finds from another era.

Step into a world where history lives in paper, ink, and postmarks.

At **BDFarrands.com,** you'll uncover a carefully curated collection of:

- **Vintage and collectible stamps** (with detailed Scott catalog listings)
- **Antique maps, postcards, and historical paper goods**
- **Unique ephemera with stories waiting to be rediscovered**

Whether you're a seasoned collector or just beginning your journey, each item offers a tangible connection to the past—small artifacts with big stories.

Start your collection today.
Or simply explore—no passport required.

Scan to Visit:

BDFarrands.com

Curated collectibles • Philatelic treasures • History you can hold