

Gelligaer Times

Newsletter of the Gelligaer Historical Society

No 6

April 2007

Spring has sprung, summer approaches and soon the society will go into its seasonal hibernation. First there is the A.G.M., when progress is reviewed and priorities for 2007-08 set

In the meantime, there are three meetings to report. In January, our secretary, Jean Kember, focussed on the 'The Tribal Princes of Senghenydd Supra and their descendants' outlining some of the products of her comprehensive research on the families of the Gelligaer area. Jean's premise is that in St. Cattwg's church yard and the graveyard of Hengoed Baptist Chapel are buried many who were descended from the tribal princes of Senghenydd Supra.

Fundamental to our understanding is that Mediaeval Wales was tribal and every member of the tribe claimed descent from a common, usually male ancestor, The Welsh paid more attention to pedigree than the English, to the despair of the English Heralds. Pedigrees were recalled by the bards the gentry employed. Two such bards operated in Tudor Glamorgan; Rhys Bychan and Dafydd Benwyn, both of whom visited Senghenydd Supra and recorded pedigrees in writing, that can be examined today. More recently other genealogists have studied Glamorgan families; G.T. Clarke, P.C. Bartrum and T.V. Davies, all of whom provided valuable research material.

Senghenydd Supra was that part of the Lordship of Senghenydd (the biggest and most important Lordship in Glamorgan) north of Caiach Brook to the Brecon Beacons - roughly coincident with Gelligaer parish. It was bounded in the south by the Anglo-Norman coastal plain, with its manors, Norman laws, and Marcher lords. Senghenydd Lordship was an upland area, with a native lord, answerable to the Norman Marcher lord in Cardiff Castle. It was a zone of conflict, the battle at Gelligaer in 1093, being a local example - the Normans were defeated.

Three lines relate to the Gelligaer area in Senghenydd Supra:

1. Rhys Goch, born 1070 in Breconshire won land in the area by conquest One branch lived in Ysgwyddgwyn Hamlet (Deri) from the 1300s, descended from Dafydd, father of Howell, born 1370. During the Civil War they were Puritan and held dissenter meetings in the farmhouse.
2. Enion ap Rhiwallon (father's pedigree included the King of Scotland) - son, Ifor, was born in 1170 in Senghenydd. Many descendants are buried in Hengoed Baptist chapel, notably Evan Edwards of Llancaiach Isaf, a farm of yeoman status. From 1100 they were known as Lords of Brithdir. During the Civil War the line was initially Royalist and Anglican, but became Republican. The family was distantly related to the Pritchards of Llancaiach Fawr.
3. Ifor ap Meurig (Ifor Bach), 1100-1170 - Lords of Senghenydd, from whom both Pritchards of Llancaiach Fawr and Lewis of the Van were descended. Although they owned land in the Merthyr area, their centre was in Gelligaer.

At the Norman Conquest the tribes were hill dwelling pastoralists and, on death, land was divided among the children (gavelkind), but usually through the same family.- primogeniture (eldest son inherits all) not adopted until 16th century. Nevertheless, three families, each descended from a different tribal prince, whether or not they

inbred with Norman settlers (especially Ifor Bach's family) contributed fundamentally to the life, stability and history of the area.

Welsh family history provided a focus for the February meeting, which heralded the return of Anthony Jones, to enlighten us further on heraldry. Indicating that heraldry began to spread across Europe in the 12th Century, it was suggested that in mediaeval Wales the uptake was slow. At that time there were two groups in Wales: gentles and nobles. Both were grouped into hundreds of tribes, whose members claimed descent from common ancestors. Indeed, no one could own property or be received into society unless they could recite their pedigree for at least nine generations - thus genealogy was important!

First to employ coats of arms were the Welsh princes, who used lions in gold and red in various positions. Thereafter, arms tended to vary with geography, with separate developments emerging from north, mid and south Wales. However, some Welsh nobles served the English crown and were granted arms in English heraldry. Some of these incorporated emblems derived from Welsh heraldry in their English coats of arms, notably the Earls of Shrewsbury, whose arms showed their family (clan) links which could be traced to Rhys ap Tudor (killed in 1091)

He informed us that in the 14th century a Welsh system was 'created' by bards, whereby branches of tribes could use the coat of arms of the person to whom they owed kinship. Their stories told of the origins or feats of the tribal heads, consequently many of these were incorporated into coats of arm symbolically. This was illustrated by reference to examples throughout Wales. Intermarriage often led to composite arms being developed.

Anthony concluded his lecture with a number of notable Welsh families whose arms reflect distant Welsh origins, e.g. Cecil family, Oliver Cromwell (family name Williams, from Cardiff) incorporated a Welsh emblem in the arms of the Commonwealth in 1655 - the last time a Welsh symbol appeared on a British coat of arms.

In March, Dave Wyatt, Centre of Life Long Learning, Cardiff, spoke about the Vikings, with particular reference to Wales. The name 'Vikings' appeared in the 19th century and our perception of them is based on the hostile writings of Saxon clerics (Alcuin, Lindisfarne - raided in 793) and the romanticised Victorian translations of Norse sagas. Now the Viking Age is agreed to have occurred between 793-1100 and they are seen as pioneering warrior mariners as well as barbarian pagan ravagers of women.

The Vikings seem to be of Germanic/Samii antecedents, with Slavic and Baltic cultural influences. Small kingdoms emerged after 500 AD, notably in coastal Norway (also Sweden and Denmark), where land was in short supply, but used for pastoral farming, supplemented by fishing. Trade was developed before 790. Thereafter expansion began, starting with small bands of raiders, but later conquest and settlement, particularly around the Irish Sea region. Reasons for this were explored, Scotland was first to suffer Viking raids and power bases were established in Orkney and Shetland, as demonstrated by archaeological evidence, from which raids to southerly locations began, Ireland was a particular target, with Dublin becoming a significant Viking commercial and industrial centre, which by the 10th century was one of western Europe's most prosperous urban centres.

Inevitably Wales was raided, the first in 852, with the north and Anglesey taking the brunt. Soon after, Pembrokeshire and the Marches attracted the Vikings' attentions. Evidence suggests they over-wintered in Pembrokeshire in 878 and that there were conflicts with local Welsh tribes. Setbacks in the early 10th century were followed by a second wave of settlement, forming a Dublin-North Wales-Chester-York Viking axis. At this time many Welsh tribal leaders allied themselves with English or Viking armies as the political situation fluctuated. In the late 10th century raids on religious

sites resumed. In the 11th century, Scandinavian presence in the Severn Estuary increased, as did their impact on Welsh politics. There are suggestions that Scandinavian rule (based on Dublin) was seen in north Wales. Considerable archaeological evidence has been gathered from a site at Llanbedrgoch (Anglesey). Finds indicate trade was significant in the area and there is evidence of a degree of cultural and political integration in the area, not unlike that seen in Ireland.

Dave's conclusions were that the Vikings, as a result of their maritime contacts and trade, embroiled Wales in the wider sphere economic and political sphere of the Viking North Atlantic world. Indeed, as indicated by use of an inverted map, it could be said that the Irish Sea was the centre of the Viking world, thus Wales, by association, must have been closer to the heart of this world, certainly than England which tended to face neighbouring parts of western Europe.

Gelligaer Volume XVI

Approval was given by those present at the March meeting for Volume XVI - 96 pages long, to be ordered, despite not being to raise (through grants) as much money as we would like to have done. Using the £400 we have received to date, plus a dip into our own funds, a deposit can be paid for the process to commence. The final publication date is to be decided, but it was decided that it would be desirable for Volume XVI to receive a formal launch.

Articles include: Tribal Princes of Senghenydd Supra & their Descendants; Letters to & from America & the Welsh National Anthem; Lewis family of Killfach Vargoed; What rises up ... Closure of Bedwellty School; Fochriw, Pontlottyn & Rhymney Brass Bands; The Norman Church -not just at Gelligaer; Thanks Goodness for Alcohol; N.L.W. Document LL/CC/G/758; Fleur-de-Lys; Immigrants from Somerset & Gloucestershire, 1976 Drought Recalled.

Copies of Volume XV, published January 2006 are still available- cost £4. Copies of Vol XIV are in short supply - any unsold copies, please return to Terry McCarthy.

Index for Vols. I-XV, available £1. GHS does not own complete collection Journals, but Bargoed Library has a complete set. If articles from past issues are required, we can arrange photocopies to be produced at 50p per page.

Grants etc.

Clive Andrewartha and TM, guided by Helen Kell from Wales Co-operative Centre have completed an application for grant help from Communities@One to establish and maintain a Society web site. The package includes training for up to six people to learn how to develop the web site, use and produce images from a digital camera (included in our bid) which can be added to our web site, besides use of programs such as 'Publisher'.

The Communities First Trust Fund grant application proved successful Clive Andrewartha with TM met C.C.B.C. Officers on Thursday 19/04 to discuss the next step. I.e. set-up a consultants feasibility study to investigate the possibilities of developing the Roman heritage in Gelligaer. On 23/04 Richard Murphy asked us to head a further application for grant aid from Bargoed Town Council — the chairman has accepted the challenge so long as it does not hinder GHS in obtaining grant aid for its own projects. This has been agreed.

We hope our support for C.C.B.C. in this project might bring benefits for GHS in future grant aid applications, besides securing the goodwill of the local authority.

Welsh Heartlands Transport Festival - 7-8 July 2007 - Blackwood Showground:
Commemorates 90th anniversary of Caerphilly and Bed was & Machen U.D.C. buses. Run on Saturday starting 11.00. Display Sunday. - Free bus from Blackwood Bus Station. Start 10.00.

Gelligaer Historical Society

Meetings 2006-07 - Bargoed Library 19.30.

2007

Wednesday 25 April South Wales Railways in World War II, Terry McCarthy

Wednesday 30 May AGM

Membership - £5 per year - non members are welcome, but a contribution of £1 per lecture would be appreciated to defray expenses.

Officers of Gelligaer History Society 2006-07:

President	Mr Islwyn Hughes
Chairman	Mr Terry McCarthy
Secretary	Mrs Jean Kember
Treasurer	Mrs Hazel Waters

A.G.M. Agenda:

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| 1. Apologies | 7. Election of Officers 2007-08 |
| 2. Minutes AGM 31/05/06 | 8. GHS Action Plan 2006-07 - Review |
| 3. Matter arising | 9. GHS Action Plan 2007-08 |
| 4. Chairman's Report 2006-07 | 10. A.o.B. |
| 5. Treasurer's Report 2006-07 | |
| 6. Secretary's Report 2006-07 | |

Meetings Scheduled for 2007-08

26 September	St. Cattwg's Church	Islwyn Hughes
24 October	Pirates of the Bristol Channel	Alan Thome
28 November	Conservation	Verity Sidgwick
13 December	Inca Way or Incapable Way?	Terry McCarthy
<u>2008</u>		
27 February	Bedwellty	David Mills
26 March	St. Francis Drake, Part III	Tudor Fisher
30 April	The Silures	Ray Howells
28 May	A topic from Mediaeval history (to be confirmed)	Maddie Gray
25 June	A.G.M.	

Conference - Saturday 29 September 2007 – Llancaiach Fawr

At a meeting at Llancaiach Fawr on 15/03/07 proposals for a Conference/Summer School were considered. Date, venue, timetable and domestic details agreed. Invitations to be issued soon. Cost to delegates £5 per head - considerable subsidy by Chris Morgan's directorate..

New Venue

At the last meeting, it was decided that meetings in the 2007-08 season would be held in Llancaiach Fawr. For any member having transport problems as a result, please contact the committee. In the meantime, we must thank the staff at Bargoed Library for hosting our meetings for the past 30 years.

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