



# Gelligaer Times

Newsletter of the Gelligaer Historical Society

No 19

www.gelligaerhistoricalsociety.co.uk

Autumn 2010

## A message from the Chair

Many things have changed since that November evening in 1961 when GHS was formally inaugurated at a meeting in the Council Offices, Hengoed. It was Gelligaer Urban District Council in the County of Glamorgan in those days. Since then we have moved through Rhymney Valley District Council (one of the six Districts in the County of Mid Glamorgan) to become part of the unitary authority of Caerphilly County Borough.

In that first session, 1961-1962, GHS had 44 adult and 18 student members (paying fees of 5/= and 2/6 respectively). Over the decades, membership and attendance at meetings has fluctuated and membership fees have changed. GHS has faced lean years but has emerged stronger, and now, based at the prestigious Llancaiach Fawr and, with a popular website attracting interest and members from a wider area, it is preparing to celebrate its achievements over the last five decades, with the hope that the Society will continue to expand and flourish to fulfil its role in fostering study of the history and heritage of the ancient parish of Gelligaer.

Annie

## 2010 Annual Conference

This year's conference, held in October, benefited from a change of venue within Llancaiach Fawr, from the education block to the function room, enabling delegates to see, hear and move around more easily than last year. The speakers, all specialists in their own field presented a variety of topics which ranged from the 13th to the 20th century.

Curator of Pontypridd Museum, Brian Davies used beautifully illustrated slides, laced with his own brand of humour, to describe the trials, failures and ultimate success of William Edwards in his attempts to build a bridge over the Taff.

The true story of a 13th century Welsh Princess was the subject of the next talk. She was locked up in a convent for most of her life but the present-day Princess Gwenllian Society ensure that she is not forgotten.

It was a trip down memory lane with Dr. Paul O'Leary for those of us with Irish ancestry. We learnt the facts and figures about Irish immigration to south Wales to add to the stories about our grandfather or great grandfather who came here seeking a better life.

'Houses don't read' was the intriguing title of Richard K Morris's talk, which had us wondering what it was going to be about. It referred to the fact that over the years, buildings were often altered and adapted at the whim of the owner to reflect a mix of styles. The text books to which archaeology students need to refer do not always reflect this. Many buildings don't 'Read the books' as the speaker was advised to do... hence the title.

The final presentation 'Welsh Voices of the Great War project' gave Dr. Gethin Mathews the opportunity to show us some of the artefacts, letters and memorabilia which had been collected from the public, following appeals and road shows. This is a community project which aims to show how the first World War impacted on the lives of ordinary people.

The conference afforded delegates the opportunity to meet, socialise and network with members of other societies, over lunch. Some societies had brought display stands and publications, as had the Gelligaer Society, who were pleased that people took an interest in our journals and list of forthcoming events.

The conference was a great success. A huge amount of activity goes on behind the scenes. The committee but particularly Annie Owens, worked tirelessly for months beforehand to ensure that everything went smoothly on the day.

The dust had hardly settled before the committee started to discuss the 2011 conference, which will be October 15<sup>th</sup> 2011. We hope to have even more people next year. So do come and bring a friend.

## BGP update

The research team continues uncovering information about the history of Bargoed and Gilfach. The local newspapers of the first four decades of the twentieth century hold a wealth of information about these communities. 1919 issues of *Merthyr Express* were thin but shed considerable light on post-war life in the still-expanding local area, including:-

- Welcome home to teachers and others who had been on active service during the war.
- Memorial Fund activities including Carnival and Sports on Easter Monday.
- On a Saturday evening in May, a resolution was passed, at a meeting in Bargoed's Trafalgar Square, demanding the release of Councillor (later M.P.) Morgan Jones.
- A procession on Peace Sunday in July, involving the clergy and members from the many places of worship in Bargoed and Gilfach.
- In August it was announced that G. W. Davies of The Emporium would give 100 guineas to Bargoed and Gilfach Memorial Fund if five others would donate £100 each.

We need as much support (both in terms of help with memories and photographs and in financial terms) as possible to produce a book worthy of both GHS itself and the communities of Bargoed and Gilfach, the largest urban area with the Society's remit. We will be pleased to hear from you if you can help in any way. Please contact the Society's website [www.gelligaerhistoricalsociety.co.uk](http://www.gelligaerhistoricalsociety.co.uk) or phone Annie on 01443 813122.

### **Report on the Meeting of October 27th 2010**

Our 2010 to 2011 series of talks began with a visit by Elizabeth Baker who gave a very interesting talk on the Roman's eating habits, some of which were rather different compared to modern day diets but some were quite ordinary and which we easily recognised as being part of our every day diet.

Elizabeth started by apologising for her non appearance last year which was caused by her breaking a tooth on the day of the proposed talk and having to seek emergency medical treatment. She said she was so determined to make up for her non attendance that if needs be she would have walked from her home in Usk to Llancaiach Fawr.

Probably one of the most exotic delicacy was a stuffed dormouse, and oysters were also another favourite. The oysters were available in great quantities and thousands of empty shells have been found when Roman sites have been excavated.

On a much more ordinary front the Romans brought cabbages, carrots and onions into Britain. It is also said that there were no nettles in Britain before the Romans but they were brought in as seeds on the Roman's shoes. On the drinks front they were noted wine drinkers but more often than not water was added to the wine. They did however acquire a taste for British beer and a number of small breweries were set up outside the forts.

Another favourite was a fish-oil paste called garum. This was made by allowing fish to rot until it formed a liquid. The sauce was paled in an amphora and transported to wherever needed.. The Romans were very keen on this and added it to virtually any type of food.

This proved to be an interesting topic and was delivered by Elizabeth in a very relaxed and amusing way but that did not detract from the fact that she had obviously done a lot of research and delivered an excellent informative talk.

*Dave Mills*

### **Report on the Meeting of October 27th 2010**

Evan James (left) & son James James



In his talk on Evan James, Gwyn Griffith the author<sup>1</sup>, made it clear that when in 1856 James James picked up his harp and composed the music for *Hen Wlad Fy Nhadau*, and his father Evan penned the hiraeth-inducing words, it was a culmination of lives steeped in music making and poetry, inspired by their love of the Welsh countryside. Maybe it was a letter from his brothers in the States, urging them to join them, that evoked this outpouring of love for their homeland.

Evan James was born in Caerphilly in 1809 into a well to do family of woollen manufacturers. His mother was a Stradling, a family noted as patrons of the arts. When his mother died, his father remarried and moved to Ffos y Hebog (Hawk's Ditch) farm above Deri. Here, as a youth, Evan was first inspired to

write poetry.

Evan's older siblings managed flannel mills in Cwm Corrwg (Argoed) and the Pandy, Pontaberbargoed as well as the nearby Inns which became centres of culture and conviviality. At Cwm Corrwg, his brother David also ran a beershop and founded a Cymreigyddion (Literary) Society. His sister Mary and brother in law ran *Yr Hen Dafarn* (The Old Inn) at Pontaberbargoed. This became the heart of family gatherings, especially for the annual Easter Festival known as *Pastir Bont*, a revival of an ancient custom. Evan himself ran the Ancient Druid Inn at Hollybush with his son James as the resident harper.

In 1847 Evan James moved to Pontypridd on the urging of his brother Lewis to take over the woollen factory at Pontnewydd. Never a chapel-goer, Evan was influenced by the ideas of the enlightenment. A literary man, he became drawn to the movement of the Archdruids and Pontypridd was its epicentre. As the poet, *Ieuan ap Iago*, Evan and his family played a lively part in the rich cultural life of the town, presiding over the *Eisteddfods* or performing poetry written in traditional Welsh metre. Their spirit lives on in the Welsh National Anthem.

During a slight initial delay Annie Owen stirred many memories with an impromptu reading of extracts from the *Merthyr Express* relating to Bargoed in the 1960's. Jean Kember talked about the cultural significance of the Gelligaer *Eisteddfods* hosted at the Harp Inn, Gelligaer, by her ancestor, the Harper, David Davies of Penygarreg. In the 1849 *Eisteddfod*, Evan James himself had won the poetry prize.

*Sue Allen*

### **Report on the Meeting of November 24th 2010**

The Name's the Same

*Pwy dych chi? Who are you?  
I'm William,*

<sup>1</sup> 'Land of My Fathers, Evan, James, their lives and times' by Gwyn Griffiths Publishers Gwasg Carreg Gwalch, Llanwrst 2006

*William, Thomas's son?  
No, William, Edward's son.  
Right.*

And so might a conversation (almost certainly in Welsh) between strangers have gone in the Gelligaer area in the 17th century. It might well have continued with questions about where the person lived, who his grandfather was, or what trade the family was in, to clarify where to situate anyone in the locality.

In November Greg Buick gave a talk to the society about the way in which surnames came to Gelligaer Parish. What a huge amount of research went into it! At times it must have been very frustrating for him as the local people in the past were not very imaginative with names and tended to re-use them down and across the generations. Even when they did start using surnames it seemed as though it was one step forward and two back for a long while, alternating between patronymics and surnames until the habit established itself by the middle of the 19th century.

Greg's painstaking research using parish registers, tax records, probate, maps census returns and even grave stones has resulted in an erudite piece of work of special interest to those who have a knowledge of the families, farms and settlements of the area and also to those undertaking family history research. For the latter group, there comes a warning: (Especially if you are a Williams, an Edwards, a Thomas or a Lewis) 'Don't be too sure you have found your great uncle 6 times removed, it could just as easily be his brother or his neighbour'.  
*Iris Owens*

### **Visit to Glamorgan Archive November 2010**

A group of members met in Cardiff for a guided tour of the Glamorgan Archive, where the old meets the ultra modern. The light, spacious purpose designed building is in sharp contrast to the former facilities, as those who had visited the previous premises could not fail to comment on.

We were able to observe how documents are received, cleaned, catalogued, bar-coded repaired, stored and retrieved and how the temperature and humidity are controlled and monitored. Our guide thoughtfully got out some documents, maps and records relating to Gelligaer parish. Being a small group had the advantage of enabling us to have a close look and to take our time seeing those aspects which interested us most. We were grateful to Annie Owen for organising the event.  
*Iris Owens*



[To look forward to](#)

### **GHS Annual Dinner**

The GHS is holding its Annual Dinner on Wednesday 26 January 2010 at Llancaiach Fawr in Nelson. The meal is two courses plus tea or coffee at £15 per head. If you would like to come please reply by mid December.

### **Program of Talks for 2010-2011**

<b>December 15th</b>	<b>Mark Lewis</b>	<b>Roman Origins of our Christmas and Customs</b> <i>Curator of the Roman Museum Caerleon - Christmas was not invented by the Victorians!</i>
<b>February 23rd</b>	<b>Jean Kember</b>	<b>The gentry houses of Gelligaer parish</b>
March 30th	Geoff Morris	The Welsh Longhouse
April 27th	Dr Edith Evans	Historic Church buildings in Llandaff Diocese
May 25th	Paul Busby	Evan Morgan 2nd Viscount Tredegar

### **Gelligaer Volume XVIII - Journal 2010**

The latest edition of our Journal is now available for £5 – there are five articles

1825 – GELLIGAER MAN TRANSPORTED TO AUSTRALIA  
1847-54 – THE GELLIGAER EISTEDDFODS AT THE HARP INN  
1834 – THE BEGINNINGS OF ABERBARGOED  
1841-TODAY – RAILWAYS IN GELLIGAER  
1894-1908 – HISTORY THROUGH SCHOOL LOG BOOKS

The Gelligaer Historical Society has published a journal since its inception. We would like to produce a small journal annually and would welcome any article you may have relating to the history of the parish or the communities within it. We don't say we will publish it and we will certainly not pay any money for it. Any piece can be from 1 to 10 pages (400 to 4000 words), although preferably not too long. If you have such an article then email it in Word or similar format to: [webmaster@gelligaerhistoricalsociety.co.uk](mailto:webmaster@gelligaerhistoricalsociety.co.uk)

### **Society Officers 2010-11**

President	Islwyn Hughes
Chair	Annie Owen
Membership	Jean Kember
Treasurer	Judith Jones
Publicity Secretary	Iris Owens
Webmaster	Greg Buick
Book and Journal Sales Officer	Gerald Kember

*Deadline for pieces for next issue 28th february*