



Gelligaer Times

Newsletter of the Gelligaer Historical Society

No 20

www.gelligaerhistoricalsociety.co.uk

Spring 2011

A message from the Chair

Since the last newsletter, members of GHS have, like everyone else in the country, endured such wintry weather that 2010-11 will take its place in history alongside 1963 and 1947. Fortunately, by late January when GHS held its Dinner in Llancaiach Fawr's Conservatory, the weather had improved, and, members (including some exiles) and friends enjoyed a fine carvery and excellent company, before participating in the light-hearted quiz organised by Clwyd Jones. (My thanks to Clwyd for all his efforts for the Quiz.)

Currently GHS Committee is planning a programme for 2011-12 to celebrate the Society's Golden Jubilee. The theme for the monthly meetings (to include a January meeting for the first time for a number of years) will remind members what Gelligaer means in the name of our Society. Gelligaer, a large upland parish in the hundred of Caerphilly, occupied the north east corner of Glamorgan. Covering about sixteen and a half thousand acres west of river Rhymney, Gelligaer parish extended some fourteen miles from north to south (from Butetown to Ystrad Fawr) and was about four miles at its widest east-west between the Rhymney and Bargoed Taff rivers. For centuries, most parishioners earned their living from agriculture or rural industries, until, in the last two hundred years or so, the mineral wealth beneath the surface was exploited and industrial communities, too numerous to list here, developed.

Together with the monthly meetings, there will be other activities to help members and others enhance their knowledge and understanding of a parish that, in his 1811 Topographical Dictionary of Wales Nicholas Carlisle described thus:

The country is open and healthy, and though the situation of the village is upland, and the whole Parish hilly, yet it is pleasant; and the chain of graduated ascending Hills and Mountains that surround it, render the Scenery particularly grand.

If you have any suggestions about the Golden Jubilee programme please contact the Society's website www.gelligaerhistoricalsociety.co.uk or any member of the Committee..

Annie

Update on the Bargoed and Gilfach research

In recent months, local people have supplied many interesting and useful details about life and work in Bargoed and Gilfach over the decades. If anyone (you don't have to be a member of the Society to be part of this project) feels they have memories and/or photographs that shed light on any aspect of the fascinating and unique history of Bargoed and Gilfach, we will be pleased to hear from you. We are interested in anything and everything about the past in Bargoed and Gilfach --- for example societies and organisations, the schools, the various clubs and public houses and the places of worship. If you have memories of any events - for example the ways in which coronations or royal weddings have been celebrated, carnivals and sports, visits by well-known people, the fire at the Cafe Ballroom - please contact us. Do you recall the queues for the cinemas in Bargoed? Can you remember when you first watched television, perhaps it was the 1953 coronation? Perhaps you remember life in Bargoed and Gilfach during World War II, or maybe you can recall stories that your parents or grandparents told you, these are all interesting to us.

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 within 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 or telephone Annie on 01443 813122.

What larks!

A relatively recent addition to the plethora of history programmes on TV gives two unlikely characters, Steve Brooker and popular broadcaster Johnny Vaughan the opportunity to frolic in the Thames mud.

When TimeTeam's Tony Robinson says '... and we've only got three days to do it...' spare a thought for the Mud Men who only have a short window of opportunity at low tide to see what the Thames has to offer.

The programme, which goes out on Sky TV's History Channel on a Monday at 9.30 follows the following format:

Johnny and Steve set off to a specific location on the Thames and indulge in lots of larking about and banter as well as 'mudlarking'. This is followed by a visit to the Museum of London where their finds are examined and analysed by the expert staff. They help the items to be put in context of their time and location, and to come alive, rather than remain mud-caked or waterlogged junk. The final part of the programme involves reconstruction of how the artefacts from a particular period would have been used by people living in the area. These range from beer pots, clay pipes, coins to shoe buckles and buttons. Steve and Johnny continue to argue and lark about over who gets the pleasant and unpleasant roles in the re-enactments.

If you think TimeTeam is populist, then Mud Men is positively vulgar. Nevertheless it is lively and informative, often funny and manages to avoid the didactic tones of history programmes of the past. Steve tells Johnny what's what down on the Thames and experts tell both of them about their finds, rather than a presenter telling the audience, as used to be the case in Sir Mortimer Wheeler's day. (If any of you are old enough to remember him). It is a fresh take on the history of both London and how life was lived in other parts of Britain at the period being explored. Whether it will have the durability of TimeTeam remains to be seen.

Have you got a favourite (or even a least favourite) history programme on TV? Why not write a review for the next edition of the Gelligaer Historical Society newsletter.

Iris Owens, Editor

What I did on Saturday 2nd April 2011

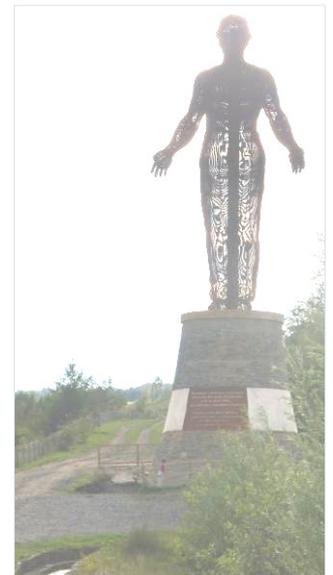
As someone brought up in a rural area, I have never had much interest in industrial history and I'm not quite sure why I ended up spending the day at an Industrial Archaeology Conference.

On Conference morning I registered in the newly-refurbished Llanhilleth Miners' Institute alongside delegates from places as far apart as Worcester, Hampshire and Swansea, before going upstairs to enjoy a cup of coffee while looking around the fine conference room and imagining some of the ways in which the Llanhilleth community had used the building since it first opened to the public in May 1906.

But, the day was not just about the building. The President of Oxford House, the host body for the 42nd South Wales and West of England Regional Industrial Archaeology Conference, welcomed delegates before a local councillor opened the conference. Then, as delegates listened to a fine talk on the Tonypany Riots, a clear explanation of the Brendon Hills Iron Mining's connections with South Wales, and a fascinating description of Nantyglo's Round Houses, the morning flew by, and the buffet lunch was served. Delegates had the chance to stretch their legs and look around the stands downstairs before returning to the conference room for the three afternoon talks. Postprandial lethargy was banished as delegates recalled holidays on the south coast while learning about Cosens & Co. Paddle Steamers operating on the Dorset & Hampshire Coast 1848, then allowed themselves to think of the breathtaking adventure of Sophia Loren and Gregory Peck in *Arabesque* during the talk on Crumlin Viaduct and, after a short tea break, marvelled at the range of finds on the recently excavated Ffos-y-fran.

Just after half past four, the conference closed, but that was not the end of the day as delegates set off on one of the four walks/visits on offer. When I was filling in the application form on a cold February day, I wasn't sure which to choose, but I ruled out the two to local industrial museums (Oxford House and Abertillery) as I thought I lived close enough to take these in on another day. The morning's talk on Nantyglo's Round Houses had made me wish that I had opted for that one but I went along to the tour of Crumlin and Navigation Colliery, those fine red brick buildings admired by many travellers on the A467.

These are a few of the photographs I took on this visit. Three of them show the grandeur of the buildings as well as the extent of damage, while a fourth captures the eastern buttress of the Crumlin Viaduct as viewed from the colliery site. After the visits delegates were invited to visit Guardian, the Miner's Memorial at Six Bells shown in my fifth photograph.



I enjoyed the day, and before the sun went down on that fine April evening, standing with the colliery's impressive buildings on my left, and the grey stone eastern buttress of Crumlin Viaduct high up on the slope to my right, I didn't need much imagination to appreciate the majesty of the area's proud industrial heritage. See you at the 43rd South Wales and West of England Regional Industrial Archaeology Conference at The Kings of Wessex School, Cheddar, 21st April 2012.

Annie

December 15th 2011 - Mark Lewis on Roman Origins of our Christmas and Customs

Mark Lewis, who is Curator of the Roman Museum, Caerleon, gave us a very interesting and amusing talk on some of the surprising connections between Christmas and the Roman World. It appears that the Roman have had as much influence on our Christmas celebrations as the Victorians. The connections have not necessarily been handed down from generation to generation since the Roman occupation, but as the Romans were involved in some of the early decisions of the Roman Catholic church their influence is there, including for instance the choice of which day is Christmas day.

Other surprising things such as use of mistletoe also appear to be of Roman origin

February 23rd 2011 - Ewart Smith on Lewis School Pengam

February 23 2011 saw one of the largest attendances at a Gelligaer Historical Society meeting for some time, when extra chairs had to be brought into The Barn at Llancaiach Fawr to seat the 60+ members and visitors gathered to listen to Ewart Smith speak about his alma mater, Lewis School Pengam. Over eight decades have passed since Arthur Wright published his seminal work, and it is refreshing to know that an experienced and competent researcher is preparing to update the history of this prestigious school.

Ewart Smith started his talk by showing photographs from his family archive, before describing and explaining changes that have taken place in the school. He recounted details including the 18th century will of Edward Lewis, the first school building near Gelligaer Parish Church, the move to Pengam, the education of girls, before referring to successive changes to the Pengam premises culminating in today's state of the art PFI building.

There were a number of first-time visitors, including some proud past pupils of the school, and we hope they enjoyed the experience and will make return visits.

March 30th 2011: Talk by Geoff Morris on The Welsh Longhouse

There was a good turnout for this fascinating talk by Geoff Morris on "The Welsh Longhouse". We in the South Wales Valleys are especially fortunate that so many have survived. There are a number of reasons for this – the prevalence of the Pedunculate Oak which provides the massive beams to support the heavy stone roof tiles and to serve as a lintel above the fireplace; the local Pennant Sandstone which splits easily for tiling; the fact that longhouses were occupied mainly by frugal tenant farmers who were less motivated to make alterations. Their survival has been ensured through listed building status.

The longhouses were built mainly in the period 1620 to 1670 in a vernacular design which had been tried, tested and copied. Built into the side of the hills at right angles to the contours, with a centrally placed chimney and very thick walls, the longhouses were warm in winter and cool in summer. There was invariably a cross passage which was aligned on a north-south axis, leading through from the single door on the front (sometimes with a porch) to the one door on the back. Threshing the barley and oats took place above the stable area. With the doors open, the through draft of wind blew away the chaff, hence the origin of the word threshold. Living quarters were on one side of the cross passage and animals were kept on the other side. The ground floor needed to be level to avoid animal waste draining into the living quarters! Animals needed to be well looked after as they were the household's source of butter, cheese, milk and meat.

Originally the windows were mullioned openings with a sheet of hessian on the inside. Over time glass replaced the hessian. In the 17th century, the kitchen was outside in a separate building. The fireplace inside the farmhouse would have a bread oven. At the side of the fireplace a narrow spiral staircase led to the upstairs room (partitioned if necessary with a blanket into separate bedrooms). Sometimes there was a trap door in the ceiling to raise or lower items which couldn't get round the spiral staircase. Occasionally this included bodies on their way to the cemetery.

Sometimes the beams of timber protruded beyond the walls of the house. When covered, they made a walkway or pentices around the building.

Throughout his talk, Geoff illustrated each feature with slides of extant longhouses in the area. Some of the farms included were Brynyscawen (above Wyllie in the Sirhowy Valley), Cwmdows in Newbridge, Gwesty Farm at Croespenmain and Kingcoed Cottage Oakdale. He made special mention on the numerous fine examples of Welsh longhouses still surviving in the area around Manmoel.

Sue Allen

Dinner January 2010

On January 26th the society again had an evening meal at Llancaiach fawr. The numbers were not as large as in previous years – the early snow and cold weather had put some people off. Nevertheless over 20 members and their spouses, including one couple who had travelled all the way from England, sat down to a very good meal. This was followed by a quiz organized by Judith's husband, the result of which was so close it required a tie breaker. The evening was enjoyed by all

Next season we plan to have the dinner the evening before the conference (2011 Friday October 14th) so any "out of town" members can have the opportunity to attend both the conference and the dinner.

Program of Talks for 2010-2011

April 27th	Dr Edith Evans	Historic Church buildings in Llandaff Diocese
May 25th	Paul Busby	Evan Morgan 2nd Viscount Tredegar
June 29th	Annual General Meeting	

Planned Events for 2011-2012

Autumn History Conference

Saturday October 15, 2011

Society Dinner

Friday evening October 14 2011

Monthly Talks – as this is the 50th Anniversary of the founding of the Society we have tried to have as many local talks as possible – if you feel you know someone who could give a good local talk please let us know – perhaps Panallta Colliery – i.e. Southern Gelligaer?

September 28 2011	Brian Davies	Dr Griffiths' Tramroad
October 26 2011	Judith Jones	The Bedlinog area/Gelligaer common
November 30 2011	Greg Buick	Hamlet of Brithdir - Pre-1840
(we plan to celebrate the 50th birthday at this meeting with a Birthday Cake).		
December 14 2011	<i>Undecided - Roman maybe</i>	
January 25 2012	<i>Maybe Dr Elin Jones – Women in Rhymney Valley - unconfirmed</i>	
February 29 2012	<i>Undecided - Darren Valley maybe</i>	
March 28 2012	Annie Owen	Bargoed & Gilfach
April 25 2012	Terry McCarthy	Railways in Gelligaer Parish
May 30 2012	Iris Owens	Coal to Dole – Regeneration project in Trelewis
June 27 2012	AGM plus a short talk on Witchcraft in the area by Ken Reynolds	

Other Events

Publication of Book on Bargoed-Gilfach

We also hope to produce a 50th Anniversary Calendar – Do you have any photos for inclusion?

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

Other Publication Available

Gelligaer Journal 2009 Volume XVII	£6	£1.50 post & packaging.
Gelligaer Journal 2007 Volume XVI	£4	£1 post & packaging
Gelligaer Journal 2005 Volume XV	£4	£1 post & packaging
Gelligaer Journal 2004 Volume XIV	£4	£1 post & packaging
Gelligaer Journal Volumes Vol XI – XV in 1 volume	£7	£2 post & packaging.
Gelligaer Journal Volumes Vol VI – X in 1 volume	£7.50	£2 post & packaging.
Gelligaer Farms & Families 1540-1840 - Garthgynydd Hamlet	£5	£1 post & packaging

The single volume collections were kindly produced for the society by Dr. Fred Holley

All publications are available at our monthly talks with no postage

Society Officers 2010-11

President	Islwyn Hughes
Chair	Annie Owen
Treasurer	Judith Jones
Publicity Secretary	Iris Owens
Webmaster	Greg Buick
Committee	Ken Reynolds
	Nesta Jones

Deadline for pieces for next issue 29th June