



Gelligaer Times

Newsletter of the Gelligaer Historical Society

No 25

www.gelligaerhistoricalsociety.co.uk

October 2012

A message from the Chair

I hope you enjoy this newsletter, the first to be edited by GHS member David Mills. My thanks to Iris Owens (Publicity Officer) for editing Gelligaer Times during the last two years, and to David for taking on this task for the coming year (and hopefully longer!). This edition contains *Nature with Nev*, which hopefully will be a regular seasonal feature. I am sure David Mills will welcome any short articles for future use, so please do not be shy and send them in.

Now that the Autumn rains have arrived, (did they ever go away?) perhaps you are looking for something to read. I recommend our new publication, *Gelligaer XIX*, which includes a range of interesting articles and, what is even more pleasing, many of them have come from contributors new to **Gelligaer** and to the Society. If you feel that you can contribute to a future *Gelligaer* please let us know; a 2013 publication will depend on having sufficient articles and the 2014 journal is planned as a Great War Commemorative issue.

Last year (2011-2012) saw the Society celebrate its Golden Jubilee and now it is *back to normal* for Gelligaer Historical Society. I hope that previous members will wish to renew their membership, and members and non-members alike will enjoy the 2012-2013 programme, details of which (including the October 20 2012 Conference) appear in this newsletter. The Society is flourishing and if any members wish to take a more active role within the Society, please contact any committee member.

If you have not already received your Gelligaer Historical Society shopping bag, you can collect it at the next meeting.

Best wishes for 2012-2013.

Annie

IT'S A SMALL WORLD AND DO NOT IGNORE FAMILY STORIES

About three years ago after a Bargoed project meeting of the Gelligaer Historical Society, Greg Buick casually asked me if I knew where Holly House and Twynyffald were in the parish of Bedwellty. I was able to confirm I knew the houses and told Greg that some of my ancestors had lived in them. He then said he had produced a draft article, jointly with a Colin Lewis (a postal historian), for inclusion in Volume XVIII of the Gelligaer Journal; the article was to be about letters sent by a convict who had been transported to Australia. This was something of a bombshell because many years ago I had been told about the letters by my Aunt; who in turn had been told by a relative that the letters were boring and full of chunks of the bible. The letters had been removed from Twynyffald by a man who was not a member of the family and sold many years ago. As it transpires the information held by Greg Buick and Colin Lewis was much more accurate than the family story, although there was some truth in what my Aunt had told me. A few weeks ago Greg sent me a copy of another letter from the convict which was however much more in line with what my Aunt had been told; namely that the letters were full of religious comments. The original chance remark set me off on a quest to find out more about the family papers and stories. I changed my mind about the papers and stories being of no interest. They are an important part of the social history of the area.

Because of that trail I also found out that another member of the Gelligaer Society, Sue Allen, was also interested in some of my ancestors, who are also related to her. Since then Sue has provided me with a lot of detail and I hope I have been able to reciprocate.

But again another, almost casual remark, by Sue about Brynsgawen Farm, which is on the side of the mountain above Wyllie in the Sirhowy valley, made me recall some papers that I had seen, well over twenty years ago, in a house called The Beeches, Hospital Road, Penpedairheol. The papers were about the Brynsgawen estate and a share that one of the previous occupants of The Beeches, Thomas Price, had in the now defunct Brynsgawen estate.

Sue was onto this in a flash and from just one or two names she was able to produce a family tree showing the relationship between Thomas Price and the Rees family of Brynysgawen. This proved that my daughters as well as being related to Sue on my side of my family are also related to Sue via their mother's father - the late Emlyn Price.

Returning to my side of the family, Sue and Greg have also enlightened me about the family of another of my ancestors Ann Lewis, who, as Ann Williams of Gellihaf Farm, married John Lewis of Cefn Fforest Farm. For many years I had always been told that Ann was one of my ancestors. Family members had pointed out her memorial stone on the North wall in Bedwellty Church. But even when I produced a book about Bedwellty Church twenty years ago I again decided to exclude her; I thought it would be of no interest and probably seem too self indulgent - I was wrong. Ann descended from a family whose surname was **usually George**, but sometimes **Williams** because of the use of patronymics. As well as being farmers, the family were involved in the very early days of the coal industry and need looking at in more detail.

Finally, a coincidence not relating to my Bedwellty/Blackwood connections. A recent publication by Ewart Smith contains a photograph of Commercial Street, Aberbargoed in the early 1900s. When I looked at it I could just about make out the name above the shop (W.REED) who is my great grandfather and had a bakery/shop. I happen to know Ewart and asked if I could see the original. A few days later Ewart produced the photograph - it was a postcard. He told me to look at the back. The writer says "Here I am at Uncle Will Reeds" and was addressed to Mrs Summers near Chew Magna, Somerset. I was aware that my great-grandfather, William Reed, had moved to South Wales from Somerset. The postcard is franked in September 1906. The shop (bakery) ceased to be such in the early 1900s when my great-grandfather retired to live in Gilwern. But guess what - for a number of years it has again been a bakery; known by everyone as Clive's and I make a point of buying bread there when ever I can.

Please do not ignore family stories, they usually have some truth in them and may be more accurate than you think!

David Mills

THE ROMAN DAY ON 30th June 2012

The previous Gelligaer Times contained a note about the Roman Day event held in June 2012. **Clive Andrewartha** has now produced the following slightly more detailed report.

The event was funded by a generous gift from the Gelligaer Fort Project. Despite the poor summer the weather on the day was kind to us. It enabled Dr. Edith Evans of Glamorgan Gwent Archaeological Trust to demonstrate Roman cooking outdoors and this was much appreciated by visitors who were able to sample the food.

Inside the Church Hall Malcolm Jones had kindly brought along a display of artefacts, some of which were finds from the Gelligaer area. These proved to be popular with the visitors, as did his replica Roman sword. Information on the Roman Fort Project was also on show. There was a steady stream of visitors throughout the morning and a good number waited to go on a guided walk of both Roman Forts, including a detailed examination of the annexe of Gelligaer Fort 2. The guides were Graham Oxlade and Clive Andrewartha. Thanks are due to Mr. Ray Norman who kindly allowed access to his land which contains the site of the baths. The walk must have been interesting because the walkers who wished to hear the talk at 2.30 just about made it back to the hall in time to hear Dr. Peter Guest of Cardiff University . He spoke about the recent excavations at Caerleon.

This amazing site has been the subject of a detailed geophysical survey and extends Roman Caerleon into the area south of the amphitheatre to the River Usk. The extensive complex of buildings appear to be commercial buildings, such as warehouses, and also high status buildings with painted wall plaster.

The buildings extend to what appears to be a wharf on the river. It is hoped that further excavations will take place in 2013 and this may be an opportunity for the Society to go on a field trip. Following Dr. Guest's talk a further walk was undertaken by a smaller number of people, but the questions asked and the answers given were of interest and rounded off a very good day.

ARCHEOLOGICAL NEWS by Clive Andrewartha

Glamorgan Gwent Archaeological Trust have reported in their latest newsletter that trial excavations at Gelligaer in advance of the proposed new cemetery extension have revealed what appears to be the Roman road coming out of the north western gateway of the earlier Flavian Fort. Also found was part of a sandstone column which probably dates from the later stone fort. It should be noted that several similar sections were found during the excavations of the baths and annex in 1909 and 1910/11, and were believed to be part of the principia. It is hoped that a detailed study of this area will take place before the work on the cemetery extension (unlike what happened or really did not happen when the previous extension was created) so that information can be gathered and details recorded.

LATEST PUBLICATIONS

We have two new publications available this September.

Gelligaer Historical Society Journal No. 19. (£3.00 but available for £2.50 at our talks)

Penallta Colliery 1905-1991 – This is a transcript of the talk given last November by Gareth Salway, the author of “Penallta: A Pit and Its People”.

Dr Thomas Llewellyn 172?-1783 – The only person in Welsh Biography Online to have been born in the Parish of Gelligaer.

An 18th Century Yeoman Family – The story of the family of Watkin Rees of Brynysgawen Farm, Mynyddislwyn in the 18th Century by Sue Allen.

An Accident – an incident on Bargoed Viaduct in 1943 described by Berwyn Jones (taken from the web-site of Welsh Society of Wellington in New Zealand by permission of his family)

The History Of Caersalem Welsh Baptist Chapel, Aberbargoed – A history of the chapel written by a member in 1902 for a local Eisteddfod. Translated from the Welsh by Colin Morgan.

Thomas Lewis DCM – how Thomas Lewis of Brithdir won the DCM; the medal has recently gone on display in the Firing Line Museum at Cardiff Castle; by Phillip Campbell Smith.

Walter Lewis J.P. (1863-1926) : the miners’ agent – The story of her grandfather who started as a miner but became a pillar of the Rhymney Valley community told by Jen Prichard.

and following up our recent Bargoed & Gilfach book

Bargoed & Gilfach Shopping – Thomas’ Shop by Martin Rees; Evans Bros’ Beehive Stores by Ann Thomas and the shopping experience by Judy Ellis

Bargoed Rugby Club 1883-1939 by Alan Jones

Bargoed Football & Cricket in the Depression Years 1929 -1933 by Iris Owen

Gelligaer Farms & Families 1540-1840 – Volume 3 - Ysgwyddgwyn Hamlet (£6.00)

Histories of the farms Bryn-coch, Bryn-rhe, Cilhaul, Cwmllywdrew, Ffos-yr-hebog, Ffynnon-duon, Fochriw, Glyn-y-march, Gwern-llwynau, Maerdy, Pen-y-bank, Pen-y-garreg, Tir Twppa, Ysgwyddgwyn Mill, Ysgwyddgwyn-isaf and Ysgwyddgwyn-uchaf.

PHOTOGRAPHS

Readers will be aware that the Society’s web site has a collection of old photographs. It would be good to include a few more or even change the existing ones. If you have any old photographs you think would be of interest; and even better if you could provide some short captions to go with them then please contact Greg Buick via the Society’s web site. If you do not have a computer, or do not wish to use one for the photographs, then Greg will be pleased to receive them at any meeting.

Nature with Nev.

A selection of some of the magical birds to be found on Gelligaer Common. Part 1.

Gelligaer Common is steeped in history, and comprises over 6,000 acres of common land. But it is not the magnificent history I am going to discuss here, but rather some of the wonderful diversity of wildlife to be found. Having good knowledge of the common gave me the opportunity to conduct a winter bird survey here for the Countryside Team in 2010, and I was amazed by the amount of birds and wildlife to be found. I have selected some of my favourite birds from the common to share with you.

The majestic Red Kite *Milvus milvus*. Red Kites are a daily occurrence on the common. Their deep red tail acting like a rudder when they fly, and glistening bright red in the sunlight offers an unmistakable and magical sight. They are so majestic and relaxing to watch as they slowly glide over vast areas in search of carrion, usually sheep which fall prey to motorists. They also eat Earthworms, mammals and birds. It is hard to believe that during the Victorian period, Red Kites were common in the streets of London. Much of their time is spent in the air, but they also use high perches in tall trees. They are bigger than the Common Buzzard at 60-65cm.



Red Kite (ND)



Redwing (Wikipedia)



Fieldfare (Wikipedia)



Little Owl (from display)

The Little Owl *Athene noctua*. Associated with the Greek Goddess of wisdom Athena, the Little Owl is characterised throughout the ages. They are surprisingly small, only 21-23cm and can be found throughout the common, usually perched on top of a dry stone wall during the daytime. A good place to see them is around the walls just down from the Howells coaches' area. If alarmed, they fly with low 'woodpecker' like stoops. They eat small mammals and birds and particularly enjoy large insects such as Beetles.

I would like to finish off my selection for Part One with two of our autumn visitors – the **Fieldfare** *Turdus pilaris* and the **Redwing** *Turdus ilacus*. Some people seem to have a little difficulty distinguishing the two apart, but it is quite easy. Firstly, the Fieldfare is quite large (25.5cm). It has a slate grey head, nape and rump, with a striking breast and a chestnut back. The Redwing is smaller at 21cm, with a creamy-white supercillium (eye stripe) and dark cheeks. In flight however, one can see where their name comes from, as the bright red under wing is very noticeable. Their food consists of invertebrates, but they will happily eat fallen fruit during the winter, even visiting gardens during cold weather. However, check any Hawthorn, Holly or Mountain Ash (Rowan) on the common as both species enjoy the rich berries to be found on these shrubs.

I hope you have enjoyed a small selection of my favourite birds found on the common as part of a regular newsletter feature. In the next newsletter, I will be looking at some of the common fungi.

Neville Davies. www.ecologycymru.co.uk Neville is a wildlife expert and author of four books, and is available for guided nature walks, surveys and power point presentations.

GELLIGAER HISTORICAL SOCIETY

History Conference

Saturday 20 October 2012 at Llancaiach Fawr Manor, Nelson

9.15+ *Arrival, registration of delegates (Tea/coffee available)* 10.00 *Welcome & Introduction to Day*

10.05 **Iron, Blasphemy and Barbados: The Erbery Family and Radicalism in 17th-Century Wales**

Dr. Lloyd Bowen, Cardiff University

The Erberys came to Merthyr in the early C17th, they bought Cefn-y-fforest farm above Treharris, Lydia Fell the quaker was born Lydia Erbery, her sister Dorcas had more radical religious views.

11.05 **Keeping Their Torches Bright**

Richard G. Felstead

Mr Felstead's grandfather Jack *Russia* Roberts fought in the International Brigade in the Spanish Civil War

12.05 *Light Sandwich/Buffer Lunch*

13.05

Finds from the Frontier:

New discoveries from the Roman fort at Brecon

Joe Lewis, Caerleon

A recently discovered assemblage, comprising hundreds of finds of Roman date, together with a few significant late Iron Age artefacts were recovered from around the Roman Fort near Brecon.

14.05 **Morgan Jones: from Conscientious Objector to Labour MP**

Wayne David MP

Morgan Jones taught in Bargoed at the time of the First World War, he was a Conscientious Objector during the war but afterwards became the local MP

15.05 *Tea / Coffee*

15.30 **Wales and the seventeenth-century medical world**

Dr. Alun Withey, Swansea University

Dr Alun Withey has ploughed through old records to shed light on the little known world of Welsh traditional medicine between 1600 and 1750.- Juice of snails used as eye drops!

16.30 *Conference ends*

16.40 *Optional post-Conference activity led by staff of Llancaiach Fawr Manor*

No Inflation - The price has been maintained for the third year

Conference Tickets £15 (includes sandwich buffet lunch and afternoon tea/coffee)

(If you have any specific dietary requests, please let us know and we shall endeavour to meet your needs)

Applications for tickets (with cheques payable to "Gelligaer Historical Society") to :

Conference Secretary, Gelligaer Historical Society,

4 Cwrt Nant Llwynog, Bedlinog, Treharris, Merthyr Tydfil, CF46 6TJ

Monthly Talks for 2012-13 Season

Talks are on the last Wednesday of each month at Llancaiach Fawr and start at 7.00 pm

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|----------------------------|--|--|
| September 26 th | The Wilson government and pit closures in south Wales, 1964-70 | Dr Ben Curtis (Cardiff University) |
| | <i>The Wilson government of the 1960s presided over the greatest number of colliery closures in south Wales of the entire post-1945 period - significantly more than the closure programme implemented by the Thatcher government in the 1980s. This talk will discuss the significance of this development and its effect upon the coalfield, as well as analysing the growth of support within the South Wales NUM (National Union of Mineworkers) for a policy of industrial action to oppose colliery closures.</i> | |
| | <i>Ben Curtis is a historian of south Wales coalfield society. He is currently employed by Aberystwyth University as a historical researcher on a project on industrial injury and disability in coalfield society. He also teaches on aspects of south Wales history at the Lifelong Learning Centre at Cardiff University. He is the treasurer of Llafur, the Welsh People's History Society. He has published several articles and his forthcoming book, "The South Wales Miners, 1964-1985", will be published in 2012/13.</i> | |
| October 31 st | Roath, Adamsdown and Splott | Jeff Childs M.A. (Joint editor of Morgannwg, Journal of Glamorgan History Society) |
| | <i>An illustrated talk about three well-known Cardiff districts from pre-Norman to modern times, focusing on the transformation of the mid-19th century rural parish of Roath into an urban, industrial and commercial area. Covering agriculture, industry, families and estates (e.g. Tredegar, Bute, Mackintosh and Roath Court), religion and suburban development.</i> | |
| November 28 th | Elizabeth Andrews | Audrey Griffiths |
| | <i>Elizabeth Andrews, JP, OBE (1882 – 1960) was born in South Wales; her life is explored within the context of the times. From humble beginnings, she became a Suffragist and a political and social activist in a period of great industrial upheaval. Her name is included in the list of 100 most famous Welsh men and women.</i> | |
| December 15 th | Three 15 minute talks | To be announced |
| January 30 th | Chartists [to be confirmed] | Geri Thomas |
| February 27 th | Benjamin Hall | Len Burland (Author of "A Historical Tour around Mynyddislwyn Mountain") |
| | <i>Benjamin Hall, 1st Baron Llanover, was a civil engineer and politician who as Commissioner of Works was notable for the construction of the Clock Tower of the Palace of Westminster. Some hold that the famous bell is accordingly known as 'Big Ben'. He married Augusta Waddington of Llanover.</i> | |
| March 27 th | The National Parks of Wales | Dr Robert Ll. Davies M.B.E. |
| | <i>Wales is fortunate in having 20% of its land area as National Park and a number of areas of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). It is essential that these areas are maintained for future generations. The illustrated talk will cover the three National Parks of Wales with emphasis on the Brecon Beacons and one AONB.</i> | |
| April 24 th | Moorish Spain | David Tolley |
| May 29 th | Pontlloftyn Murder in 1920s | Iris Owens |
| June 26 th | Annual General Meeting | followed by A short talk |

Gelligaer Volume XIX - Journal 2012

The Gelligaer Historical Society has published a journal since its inception. We intend to produce a journal for the beginning of next season 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 please email it in Word or similar format to: webmaster@gelligaerhistoricalsociety.co.uk by the end of July

Current Publication Available

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|---|----------------|-------------------------|
| Bargoed and Gilfach, A Local History | £10 | £5.00 post & packaging. |
| Gelligaer Journal 2012 Volume 19 | £3 *NEW | £1.00 post & packaging. |
| Gelligaer Journal 2010 Volume 18 | £3 | £1.00 post & packaging. |
| Gelligaer Journal 2009 Volume 17 | £4 | £1.50 post & packaging. |
| Gelligaer Journal 2007 Volume 16 | £3 | £1.00 post & packaging |
| Gelligaer Journal 2005 Volume 15 | £4 | £1.00 post & packaging |
| Gelligaer Journal Volumes Vol XI – XV in 1 volume | £5 | £2.00 post & packaging. |
| Gelligaer Journal Volumes Vol VI – X in 1 volume | £5 | £2.00 post & packaging. |
| Gelligaer Farms & Families 1540-1840 – Vol. 1 - Garthgynydd Hamlet | £5 | £1.00 post & packaging |
| Gelligaer Farms & Families 1540-1840 – Vol. 2 - Brithdir Hamlet | £7 | £1.50 post & packaging |
| Gelligaer Farms & Families 1540-1840 – Vol. 3 - Ysgwyddgwyn Hamlet | £6 *NEW | £1.50 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