



Gelligaer Times

Newsletter of the Gelligaer Historical Society

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ANNUAL CONFERENCE REVIEW AND CHRISTMAS EDITION

A message from the Chair

Gelligaer Historical Society has been very busy since the last newsletter appeared. We have enjoyed fine speakers at our well-attended monthly meetings in September, October and November when former members took the opportunity to renew their membership for 2012-2013 and new members (including some young people) joined. Our talks continue to attract visitors: in September, former schoolmates came along to hear *local boy* Dr. Ben Curtis speak on *The Wilson government and pit closures in south Wales, 1964-70*, the illustrated talk (by Jeff Childs M.A.) on *Roath, Adamsdown and Splott* in October attracted visitors from as far afield as Abergavenny, Rhondda Valley and, unsurprisingly, Cardiff, while Dr. Elin Jones a GHS founder student member, was in the audience for Audrey Griffiths' talk on *Elizabeth Andrews* in November.

In spite of the fact that there were many competing attractions for local and family historians in south Wales during October 2012, our Conference at Llancaiach Fawr on October 20 was very successful, and this newsletter carries Sue Allen's brief report on each of the five talks delivered to that day's discerning and appreciative audience. It is not invidious to mention that, alongside over twenty of our own members, neighbouring local history societies such as Fleur-de-Lys and Pontllanfraith were well represented and the daughter and grandson of Morgan Jones M.P. travelled from Bath to hear the talk by Wayne David M.P. in the afternoon. The day was enhanced by some fine displays and we thank those people and societies for their time and effort, as well as the staff of Llancaiach Fawr for their professionalism, ensuring the day runs smoothly.

Representatives of Gelligaer Historical Society manned stands at **Glamorgan Family History**



Society's Fair at Rhydycar in Merthyr Tydfil and at GAVO's One Beat at Ty Penallta during October. **These photographs were taken in Caerphilly County Borough's Ty Penallta at GAVO's One Beat**, a celebration of the work of the voluntary sector in the county borough on Saturday October 27 2012. Not



only did Radio Wales personality Roy Noble visit Gelligaer Historical Society's stand, he also accepted an inscribed copy of our *Bargoed and Gilfach a local history*.

To see further photographs of the event visit CCBC website

<http://www.caerphilly.gov.uk/site.aspx?s=zvzTcFWLhAiwrnOa88BXvYkMQwS0mF9WPC6INojeepvwDXyOdM2ncRCFtG+xBcl+0kIfIjHd/s>

Although a year has passed since *Bargoed and Gilfach a local history* was launched, it is still in demand, and together with the Society's other publications (including the recently published *Gelligaer Volume 19 and the third part of Greg Buick's parish-wide study of farms and their families*) would make ideal Christmas gift to anyone interested in local history and heritage.

Currently some Society members are researching the local area in the era of World War I in preparation for a publication in 2014 to commemorate the start of that conflict. If you have any family stories relating to that era or if you know of any memorials (e.g. in places of worship) we will be pleased to hear from you.

Best wishes for a happy Christmas and a peaceful and healthy 2013.

Annie



LLANCAICH FAWR STARTING AT 7 p.m.

The usual monthly “talk” will be a much more informal meeting. It will comprise of :-

David Williams will read a short article his father wrote on his WW1 experiences

Greg Buick will bring along some old deeds which have been given to the society

Lyn Pask (Pontllanfraith History Society) will bring along some of his maps of mining in the local area and explain how accurate (or not) they are.

Graham Oxlade will bring along some of his coin collection and artefacts as will **Clive Andrewartha** and **Mal Jones**.

It is hoped that attendees will ask as many questions as they wish so that basically we can all have a good chat and share our knowledge.

Cheers!

On the Saturday in June 2012 when much of the country was planning to celebrate 60 sparkling years of the current monarch's reign, I was on a short break in the Midlands just south of Burton -on Trent. So while families, friends and neighbours were watching the weather forecast and trying to work out just where to light the barbeque when the rain started, my son and I decided that a trip to The National Brewery Centre was a good choice for a morning out for a couple of closet republicans. Apart from a young couple, we were the only ones on the tour, which meant we could see and hear really well as we went around and had time to ask questions of our guide. The guided tour is described as the Brewing Experience and tells much of the family history of the Bass family and also looks at the history of brewing and the social history of the thousands of people involved in it. The biological and chemical processes of what happens when hops, malt and water come into contact are explained but not to the extent as to blind you with formulae. The importance of the local water supply is also stressed and the difference hard or soft water makes to the process of making beer. For people interested in the mechanical aspects of industry, there is also a section on how steam power transformed brewing and how the internal combustion engine revolutionised distribution. Shire horses played an important role harnessed to drays and many knew their route from pub to pub and back to the brewery on days when the dray man had had 'one over the eight'. There is a collection of motor vehicles dating from the early days when barrels were delivered by lorry. The horses have not been forgotten and there are still two which stand at least 17 hands in height stabled on site.(*note by editor-to the uninitiated a hand is 4 inches - I run the risk of being prosecuted for not giving the metric equivalent !*).

If you are not over-awed by huge beasts they can be petted through the iron bars of their loose boxes. They regularly take part in local festivals and parades and after the tour, visitors can go on a horse-drawn carriage ride around the area. It was rather too cool and damp to take up the offer on Jubilee Saturday. We opted instead for a quiet sit down (the tour lasts about an hour and a half) in *The Brewery Tap*, where we cashed in our vouchers for small samples of ale before setting out into the *Marmite* scented air of Burton-on-Trent.

Iris Owens

The Society is fortunate to have Sue Allen as a member and on behalf of the Society I offer her our grateful thanks for the following review

David Mills, Editor

REVIEW OF THE CONFERENCE LECTURES

Sue Allen

Iron Blasphemy and Barbados: The Erbery family: Radicalism in 17th Century Wales

By Lloyd Bowen, Senior Lecturer in Early Modern Welsh History at Cardiff University

Originating in the West Country, the Erbery family were involved in the woollen industry. Trading from Bristol, they developed links with South Wales. At the turn of the 17th century, Thomas Erbery settled in Merthyr and diversified into the iron industry, buying up the forge at Pontygwaith and the furnace at Pontyrhun. By the 1620's, he was an ironmaster, now also with ironworks near Swansea, importing bar iron and exporting manufactured iron through Cardiff, where he also had land.

Thomas Erbery's son William was sent to Brazenose College Oxford and became a vicar in Cardiff. However, as a Puritan he refused to proclaim in church the requirements of the Caroline Book of Sports. He was forced to resign his living in 1638.

After the death of his father, he could afford to become an unpaid preacher. He was influential among the nonconformist community in Merthyr Tydfil, which was seen as a hotbed of radicalism. During the Civil War, he was a Parliamentary chaplain in the regiment of the Earl of Essex. After the war, he was an itinerant minister and a 'Seeker' after divine revelation. Against monarchy, and suspicious of government and hierarchies, he embraced the theology of Quakerism. He died in London in 1654.

Ideas and beliefs spread along trading routes. About 1656, William's widow Mary, and daughter Dorcas were imprisoned in Exeter for interrupting a minister to challenge his authority. They had come under the influence of James Naylor in Bristol, & Dorcas later appears singing 'Holy Holy Holy' as Naylor rode blasphemously through the Bristol streets in imitation of Christ's entry into Jerusalem. Dorcas's signature is also on a petition of 7,000 Quaker women against tithes.

William's daughter Lydia married Henry Fell, a Quaker Missionary who proselytised in Barbados, Surinam, Egypt and India. She accompanied him to Barbados in the 1670's and produced a pamphlet about the problems of converting the people of Barbados to Quakerism. Her brother Mordecai owned Cefn Forest and Tir Cook farms. Lydia inherited much of the family estate and especially the land in Merthyr Tydfil upon Mordecai's death in 1678. It was on the neighbouring Pantannas farm in the Quaker Burial Ground, which became known as Quaker's Yard, that Lydia Fell was buried in 1699. The lives of Mary, Dorcas and Lydia are testimony to the active role of women in the Quaker movement, which allowed women to preach.

***Keeping their Torches Bright: Jack 'Russia' Roberts and his Welsh Comrades in the Spanish Civil War* by Richard G. Felstead**

Jack 'Russia' Roberts had an inauspicious start to life. Born illegitimate in 1899, brought up by an aged and infirm grandmother, beaten at school because he was left-handed and for not speaking English, he started work at Universal Colliery Senghenydd in 1913, the year of the horrific colliery disaster. In the following years, his bitter experience of wage cuts and lockouts converted him to the communist cause. He gained the nickname Jack 'Russia' when the Russians sent funds to support the miners in the 1926 Miners' Strike. He endured six months imprisonment because of his resistance to blacklegs. Eventually, standing as a Communist, he became the successful candidate for Abertridwr Ward on Caerphilly UDC, a post which he held until 1953.

When the Fascist General Franco overthrew a democratically elected government in Spain in July 1936, the unemployed Jack 'Russia' was one of 170 Welshmen to enrol in the International Brigade, rallying to the cry of 'No Pasarán'. Travelling through France and climbing the Pyrennes, he arrived in Spain in May 1937. At Madrigueras, he was confronted with atrocities – a priest who had been firing indiscriminately at the people was hurled from the church tower with a noose around his neck. Soon, the XVth International Brigade was embroiled in the battle of Brunete with disastrous losses. Inadequately trained, with sticks instead of rifles, they were to endure long route marches, attacks by snipers and fascists throwing hand grenades, aerial bombardment from Italians and Germans, fever and lack of food and water. Eventually the Brigade was incorporated into the Spanish Republican Army and its members were forbidden to leave. Morale reached a low ebb and there were desertions. Jack became the Political Commissar for the British Battalion and focused on political education, welfare and discipline. When the Battalion was ordered to take

a strategic hill east of Madrid, they came under murderous fire and Jack was wounded. On his recovery, he was sent to a training school under Ramón at Tarrazona.

In February 1938, he returned to Wales to contest his seat at Abertridwr. He was returned unopposed. La Pasionara paid tribute to the work of the International Brigade at their farewell parade in Barcelona in November 1938. Richard Felstead's biography of Jack 'Russia' Roberts, *No Other Way*, is a tribute to his grandfather's selfless sacrifice.

Finds from the Frontier: New Discoveries from the Roman Fort at Brecon

by Joe Lewis, Education Support Officer at the National Roman Legion Museum in Caerleon.

About 450 objects were discovered through metal detecting at Brecon Gaer Roman Fort in 2008-9. As metal detecting destroys the context and stratigraphy, the question was whether the finds would be hard to interpret. The site of the fort had previously been excavated by Sir Mortimer Wheeler (1924-5) where 60% of finds were pottery. It had been postulated that this was a base for a cavalry unit. This was confirmed by the fact that 60% of the finds by the metal detectorists were copper alloy objects and comprised mainly fittings for horses, such as harness pendants. The bottom end of a scabbard, which was found, was specifically for a horseman's sword, designed for hacking rather than stabbing. Coin finds show that the main military occupation was in the 1st and 2nd century but there might have been a reduced garrison there after 222 AD. Other finds, such as tankard handles and a Celtic dragon brooch, provided evidence of a settlement of the indigenous population outside the fort which may have moved into the fort after the Romans left. A steelyard balance bar and weights were evidence of trade.

Morgan Jones, from Conscientious Objector to Member of Parliament by Wayne David M.P.

Born in Gelligaer in 1885, Morgan Jones won a scholarship to Pengam and went on to study at Reading University. He became a Baptist Lay preacher and a teacher. By 1911 he was politicised and had become an effective public speaker. He rejected Lib-Labism and as a Socialist he joined the ILP.

He represented Bargoed on the Gelligaer UDC and was active in campaigning for better housing, sanitary conditions, transport and hospitals. In spite of the local enthusiasm on the outbreak of war in 1914, Morgan Jones opposed it on religious, moral and political grounds, seeing it as a conflict between the ruling classes. He became a member of the No Conscription Fellowship. When conscription was introduced in 1916, he did not respond to his call-up papers. On 29th May 1916, he was arrested at home in Bargoed and was brought before a local tribunal. He was fined 2/- and spent 4 months in prison, being transferred to Cardiff Jail. In 1916, he modified his position to become an 'alternativist' i.e. he would not fight but would work in the support services e.g. stretcher bearer. He later spent time in a prison in North Wales and at Wormwood Scrubs. He suffered physical abuse in prison and almost had a nervous breakdown. He was released after two years in prison but his health was affected. He hoped to become a teacher at Lewis Boys but he was blackballed and became a labourer in the colliery. In 1920, he became a full time organiser for the ILP. In 1921, there was a bye election in Caerphilly, fought against a background of the crisis in the coal industry, with wage cuts and redundancies and trade union militancy.

Morgan Jones stood against the Liberals as well as against the first Communist to stand in a parliamentary election. On 21st Aug. 1921, he was elected Labour M.P for Caerphilly with a 54.3% share of the vote, the first conscientious objector elected to Parliament. He was a good constituency MP and served as a Junior Education Minister in two Labour governments. He died in April 1939 after contracting a rare disease on a visit to the West Indies. Morgan Jones Park in Caerphilly was built as a tribute to his achievements.

Wales and the Seventeenth-Century Medical World by Dr. Alun Withey, Exeter University

The difficulty of researching medical practice in Wales in the 17th Century is that there were no universities, hospitals or medical training in Wales at that time and no printing press until 1718. The first medical book in Welsh dates from 1732. Although many people relied on folkloric medicine, evidence exists in advertisements, almanacs and probate inventories for the existence of apothecaries who not only sold medicines but also practised physical healing such as bone setting and blood letting. As well as exotic drugs, potions, spices, cordials and oils from foreign parts, their inventories might include syringes, saws, knives and barbering items. Apothecaries were to be found in the main market towns of Wales such as Ruthin, Denbigh, Wrexham, Brecon and Haverfordwest. There is documentary evidence that apothecaries took on apprentices. Welsh medical practice was tied into wider medical networks and part of an increasingly global economy, with apothecaries often sending to London for their stock and emulating their London counterparts.

HELP WITH A PROJECT

Our neighbours at **Pontllanfraith History Society** are currently researching **John Hodder Moggridge**, who is generally acknowledged as the founder of present day Blackwood. He was also instrumental in setting up the settlement which became known as Fleur de Lys; this is referred to in the book produced in 2006 by **Fleur de Lys History Society**.

Pontllanfraith society hope to publish a definitive book on Moggridge which will also serve as a history of Blackwood. Whilst there have been a number of articles written about Moggridge in the past then not all are strictly accurate and this publication will hopefully put the records straight.

If anyone has information on Moggridge or are able to direct the group to a particular source then please e-mail lynask@talktalk.co

GELLIGAER COMMON by CLIVE ANDREWARTHA

On Wednesday 28th October 2012 society members met Dr. Edith Evans and colleagues from GGAT, together with other volunteers, at **Pen Carn Bugail** on Gelligaer Common, an area that had been field walked in late March 2012. This time, however, we were joined by **George Nash of Bristol University** who is an expert on rock art. He confirmed that the cup-marked stone previously discovered is **NEOLITHIC**, thus extending human activity on the common back several thousand years prior to the Bronze Age. There are already many known examples of Bronze Age activity on the common. However, whilst it is pleasing to note that the importance of this unique landscape has been afforded recognition, it is clear that work to date has barely “scratched” the surface and the area deserves much more detailed study and protection.

GHS bags have been spotted at a number of places as shown by the following photographs

Please let us know if your GHS bag been to any interesting places that deserve mention in the next issue of *Gelligaer Times*.



GHS friends displaying their GHS bag at **London's Olympic Park** which hosted a variety of attractions and events during the Games of the XXX Olympiad.

GHS bag waiting to board the barge for a leisurely evening cruise from **Brecon Canal**

Basin to the fine four arch masonry aqueduct over the Usk at Brynich.

GHS bag resting against a post at **TNA**

The National Archives (TNA),

The modern name for what we used to know as the Public Record Office (PRO), is the UK government's official archive. Its millions of documents, files and images cover over one thousand years of history and shed light on many aspects of local history as well as national and international matters. Readers of *Gelligaer Times* may be interested to know that our researchers used some of these sources when researching in advance of its Golden Jubilee publication, *Bargoed and Gilfach a local history*. Sources relating to Bargoed and Gilfach's elementary schools highlighted and explained difficulties imposed by the severe over-crowding in the schools of these emerging industrial communities during the half century prior to 1930. Other sources in The National Archives provided information on local transport and industrial developments

Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal

The canal linked rural Breconshire with industrial south east Wales and, via the port of Newport, with the wider world. In its heyday, the horse-drawn barges carried not only food for the human and animal workforce in the industrial communities but also the products of the heavy industries. In 2012, as the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal celebrates the 200th anniversary of its opening in 1812, the barges are not horse-drawn, and move majestically along the canal, easily overtaken by walkers and joggers on the towpath alongside.

Golden Jubilee gift to Bargoed Library

The success of *Bargoed and Gilfach a local history* prompted Gelligaer Historical Society to mark its Golden Jubilee in a more concrete way in the wider history community. On October 19 2012, representatives of the Society attended Bargoed Library to make a contribution towards the purchase of a much-needed map cabinet for the library's local history collection. This fine-looking cabinet is in the research area and bears a plaque inscribed:-

*Purchased with the financial assistance
of
GELLIGAER HISTORICAL SOCIETY
in its
GOLDEN JUBILEE SEASON
2011-2012*

The photograph on the left below, shows long-serving GHS Committee Member, **Nesta Jones**, presenting a cheque to **Jayne Lee, CCBC Libraries Operations Manager**. On the right hand side photograph Nesta is supported by (left to right) Clive Andrewartha, David Mills, Judith Jones and David Williams.



On the day of the presentation of the cheque **Huw Lewis A.M. Minister for Housing, Regeneration and Heritage** was present at the Library to make an announcement about future regeneration schemes. He said that Bargoed Library was one of his favourite buildings and visits whenever he can. After the announcement he asked to meet GHS members (who just so “happened” to be present) and he spent a few moments with them talking about heritage matters and the benefits of the Library at Bargoed. Official photographs were taken, but as yet they have not been seen. If any reader has, however, seen them then please contact Greg Buick via the society's web site.

OLD OR NOT SO OLD PHOTOGRAPHS

In a previous edition of GHS Times I asked if readers could contact our Website or Greg Buick if they had any photographs that may be of use to the society. By way of setting an example I have submitted the photograph on the next page which shows the late **Fred Evans M.P.** and former head of Lewis' School, Pengam as he walked around Pontlottyn. The photograph is one of many held at **Howard Jones' shop at Pontlottyn**. There are some lovely items of memorabilia at the shop and if you have not yet visited please do so. Howard will always provide a warm welcome to anyone interested in the local history of Pontlottyn (and it is still an “old fashioned” ironmongers where you can buy virtually anything in whatever quantity you want-unlike the larger stores !!).

David Mills

“Medical science can make us live to 90. If you haven't got the arts and humanities, what's the point of living to 90.....Leszek Borysiewicz V.C. of Cambridge”



CHRISTMAS PRESENTS

WHY NOT COME ALONG TO THE TALKS ON WEDNESDAY 12TH DECEMBER 2012

Where the following new publications will be available together with many of the older editions
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 – One of the few people 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, Abergargoed – 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 Philip 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 Allan Jones

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

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

Histories of the farms Bryn-coch, Bryn-rhe, Cilhaul, Cwmllydrew, 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.

New Book by Ifor Coggan

The society has been contacted by Ifor Coggan with brief details of a new book entitled “A History of Mining in the Darren Valley” price £8.95 plus postage and is available from fochriwhistory1@tiscali.co.uk. It is also available at Howard Jones’ shop in Pontlottyn.

This news letter concludes with an article by Laura Mathews who is one of the newest and youngest members of Gelligaer Historical Society. It is hoped that Laura will contribute more articles to the society and we look forward to her presence at many more meetings in the future.

BLAENAVON

The Blaenavon Community Heritage and Cordell_museum, based in the community of Blaenavon, tells a small and unique piece of the story of the Second World War, focusing on its effects on the local community. As well as providing tours for local schools, the museum offers a family history service that gives the public a chance to gain an insight into their own family history and trace their family tree with the help of Richard Roynon, a volunteer at the museum.

The museum has an awe inspiring collection of artefacts, often donated by local people, which includes a large collection of war medals. There is also a room dedicated to author Alexander Cordell - who famously wrote *Rape of the Fair Country* in 1959, a novel which was inspired by Blaenavon.

The museum itself is dependent on volunteer work and support, and during the last 3 months I have been regularly volunteering there alongside other volunteers from the local community. The museum is striving for accreditation and is hoping to gain this by August next year. Even without this accreditation however, the museum continues to be popular with schools and visitors from around the UK and beyond who come to enjoy the many treasures that the museum has to offer.

Laura Matthews

STOP PRESS

Dr. E Wyn James Reader and Co-Director of the Cardiff Centre for Welsh American Studies at Cardiff University has agreed to address Gelligaer Historical Society on the American diaries of Morgan John Rhys (born Llanbradach 1760 –died Pa, USA 1804). It is hoped that the lecture will take place at **Hengoed Baptist Chapel** on a Saturday in May 2013. Watch this space.