



Gelligaer Times

Newsletter of the Gelligaer Historical Society

No 27

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APRIL 2013

Message from the Chair

As I write this, we are enduring what I hope is the last blast of cold weather for the 2012-2013 winter. My recent researches into the World War I era in the local area have revealed some previous occasions when Gelligaer parish experienced cold weather in late March. Just a few weeks ago, I was in Bargoed Library reading *Merthyr Express* for early April 1916 when I came across graphic accounts of a severe snow storm at the end of March 1916. It seems that a group of young people from Pantywaun (at the time a small mining community) had been to see a picture show in Pontlottyn and, while some of them had stayed in Pontlottyn overnight, others had set off for home only to become trapped under snow drifts. It was about 7.30 the following morning when some of them were rescued. Unsurprisingly, all were cold and exhausted, and some were barely conscious. Sadly one 13 year old boy perished. At the time, his father was away on army training at Rhyl. There was great damage in Trelewis where trains were stopped as telegraph poles and wires were brought down over the GWR branch line to Dowlais and local farmers had to spend time searching for sheep buried in the snow.

Although I am spending some time researching the World War I era in the local area. I have found time to do other things, including attending some classes in National Museum Cardiff in which I have learned a little about Concrete Poetry and Landscape Art. As a result I began to think about local examples and realised that our area has a wealth of such features dating from prehistoric times to the present day. I will not try to list them here, suffice that I mention a few such as Maen Catwg, Tegernacus Stone, Bute Stones, War Memorials, Sultan (as well as other examples in Parc Penallta and other local country parks) and north Bargoed's Angel (erected late 2012). If any reader of *Gelligaer Times* would like to take on the challenge of listing (and perhaps also photographing) some of these features, please contact me. I think it could be a worthwhile project.

During 2012-2013 Gelligaer Historical Society monthly meetings have been well-attended and we hope members and visitors will continue to find the programme attractive. In addition to the monthly meetings, GHS is holding Hengoed Heritage Day on Saturday 25 May 2013 and details of this appear elsewhere in this newsletter and will be posted on the website www.gelligaerhistoricalsociety.co.uk together with other information including details of the speaker booked for the AGM in June and a list of our publications.

I hope that by the time you read this we will be enjoying some spring-like weather so that we can get out and about to enjoy the local heritage at first hand.

Best wishes *Annie*

HENGOED HERITAGE DAY

SATURDAY 25th MAY 2013 (10a.m. to 4 p.m.)

Venue HENGOED BAPTIST CHAPEL, CHAPEL TERRACE, HENGOED CF82 7JU

PROGRAMME

10 a.m. Open for visitors

11 a.m. Welsh for family Historians Led by Clwyd Jones

12 noon. Wildlife and Plants in a Graveyard Led by Neville Davies

If the weather is favourable the 11 a.m. and 12 noon talks may include a walk around the graveyard.

2 p.m. MORGAN JOHN RHYS and his American Diaries Dr.Wyn James

Born at Gaddfa farm, Llanbradach in December 1760, member of Hengoed Baptist Church, Baptist minister, Morgan John Rhys left for America in 1794. He kept a diary when making a horseback tour in America just after arriving in that country. Dr Wyn James has recently been edited the diary.

During the day copies of some of the Chapel Registers and a transcription of the Gravestones made in 1988 will be available for inspection. However access may be limited during the duration of any of the talks.

Refreshments will be available.

CAR PARKING will be available at the adjoining primary school.

ALL WELCOME FREE ENTRY

Gelligaer Historical Society History Conference at Llancaiach Fawr

The Society takes this opportunity to inform readers that it is not planning to hold a Conference in October 2013 because of the large number of competing events in south east Wales on Saturdays in the autumn.

However, as the Conference held in October 2012 was so successful and the feedback (both verbally and on the evaluation forms) was positive, the Society does not intend to abandon such events. Currently plans are being made to organise a similar event March/early April 2014 which we hope will attract the interest of those who have attended past events as well as newcomers. There will be more information available in future issues of *Gelligaer Times* and on the Society's website www.gelligaerhistoricalsociety.co.uk.

In the meantime, perhaps you will be interested in attending our Hengoed Heritage Day (Saturday 25 May 2013 at Hengoed Baptist Chapel) which is advertised elsewhere in this newsletter.

Gelligaer Historical Society Trip to Tyntesfield

Committee member Iris Owens is organising a trip to Tyntesfield, a National Trust property in Somerset. It is a fine Victorian country house surrounded by gardens and spacious parkland.

See <http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/tyntesfield/> for further information about Tyntesfield.

Date of trip – **Wednesday 17 July 2013.**

The bus will start from Nelson at 10 am and the journey home will start at 4 pm.

Book your seat by paying a deposit at our April or May meetings or contact Iris.

Balance of payment will be due at or before the Society's AGM (June 26 2013).

NB – this visit is open to members and non-members.

PRICES : £12 for G.H.S. members and £15 for non members

Gelligaer Historical Society World War I commemoration project

The Society's researches relating to the World War I era continue to shed light on contemporary life and work in the local area as well as uncovering some of the remarkable stories associated with local people serving in the war. If you have a family story relating to the war, we would love to hear from you.

(Just to remind readers --- The Society studies local history and heritage in the area of the old parish of Gelligaer in east Glamorgan, which includes the modern communities of Pontlottyn, Bargoed, Hengoed, Ystrad Mynach, Trelewis, Bedlinog, Fochrbw and Deri as well as the village of Gelligaer itself.)



This photograph shows Jeff Cuthbert A.M. (centre), with Annie Owen and Dr. David Williams standing in front of the memorial plaque in Bargoed's Calfaria chapel. This is just one of many such memorials placed within local buildings in the aftermath of World War I, the first international war to affect communities the length and breadth of the country. If you know of a similar plaque in a building in your locality, the Society will be pleased to receive details (accompanied by a photograph if possible) at www.gelligaerhistoricalsociety.co.uk or Annie ☎ 01443 813122.

HEADS UP

Next seasons monthly talks will start on **25th September 2013** at Llancaiach

Fawr, at 7 p.m. David Cartwright will speak about his family, the Cartwrights of Dowlais, who went to work in Hughesovka, (Yuzovka) in Ukraine (*founded by Welshman John Hughes*). David's father, Edward Cartwright, was born in Yuzovka in 1917 at the height of the Russian Revolution. Immediately prior to the Second World War David's family ran a newsagents business in Bargoed and Edward captained the Bargoed Rugby Team.

Hughesovka in the Ukraine 1912

(renamed Stalino in 1924, and Donetsk 1961-population now 1m.)



THE IRIS OWENS TOUR GUIDE

Antiquities in Staffordshire

Visitors to Staffordshire might very likely be attracted to the potteries and museums associated with the area but it is worth stepping off the Pottery trail and checking out some of the other interesting sites. In 2012 I had two opportunities to visit South Staffs and both times visited Lichfield Cathedral. On the first occasion the bells were peeling to celebrate the Queen's Diamond Jubilee in June; the next time was in December, when volunteers were decorating the interior ready for Christmas. Saint Chad brought Christianity to the area and was the first Bishop from 669 to 672 A.D. He was a very holy man and his tomb soon became a magnet for pilgrimages. The Cathedral was dedicated in the year 700.A.D. It is the only medieval cathedral in Britain with three spires, they are said to represent the Holy Trinity.

One of the surprising aspects of a visit is that although there is beautiful stained glass along the side walls, the eastern aspect - The Lady Chapel- has clear glass. This is because currently the medieval stained glass windows are away being restored and conserved. The clear panels were installed in 2010 and the restored and conserved panels will not be returned until 2015. The glass panels were originally made in Herkenrode in the 1530s and acquired from Belgium and installed at Lichfield in 1830. The weather and pollution have caused deterioration to both the glass and the retaining brickwork. The project is costing millions and fund-raising is continuous. Some of the other attractions are the Lichfield Angel, the Saint Chad Gospels and a medieval wall painting. At the time of my second visit there was an exhibition of artefacts and reproductions from the Staffordshire Hoard, on display in the Cathedral. There were plenty of volunteers on hand to explain the context of the finds of this significant medieval treasure.

Not quite as old as Lichfield Cathedral is the accommodation in which I was staying, although it can lay claim to 1000 years of history - this is Wychnor Park (Wychnor being Saxon for Wood Over). The original foundations were laid by the Norman Baron Sir Phillippe de Sommerville, who wasted no time after the Battle of Hastings in setting up his 'des res' in this charming part of England in 1066.

The De Sommervilles remained in occupancy for three centuries, after which it passed into the hands of the Griffiths family in 1355. Throughout its history Wychnor Park has been extended, improved and modernised by the succession of wealthy families who lived there. It was sumptuous and comfortable enough to play host to King James 1 in 1621. The great hall was burnt to the ground in 1750 but the occupants continued to rebuild and thrive. The premises is now a country club and well worth a visit. One of the secrets of South Staffs

Dr Johnson's Birthplace

If the eighteenth century and literature are more your field of interest, then a visit to Samuel Johnson's birthplace, a five storey house in the centre of Lichfield could be for you. The house and bookshop remain much the same as when the building was completed in 1708 and very little has been done to remind you that you are in the 21st century. The stairs could well prove daunting for the less mobile but there are hand-rails and all five floors are worth the effort. On the first floor there is a short film on a continuous loop outlining the life and work of Samuel Johnson. The other floors are furnished in the eighteenth century style and reflect Johnson's works. Of special interest to me was the attic which looks at the development of his dictionary and also includes inter-active displays. If after your visits to the Cathedral and Johnson's house you are fainting away for lack of food and drink, Lichfield has an abundance of cafes and pubs. Many of the pubs are very old and some are housed in seventeenth century half timbered buildings no longer totally perpendicular. Some have flagstone floors and open fires and when I was there in December, a real if somewhat anachronistic Christmas tree.

The National Memorial Arboretum

Fast forward now to the twentieth century and while in the area include a visit to the National Memorial Arboretum; not a dismal or morbid place at all but a beautiful peaceful and thought-provoking site which includes over 200 different memorials representing military, civil service, local and overseas organisations and charities. Very modern and geared up to the needs of able-bodied and disabled visitors, the venue includes a restaurant. So ignore the wind and rain and visit this open space of gardens, trees, and sculpture. It is manned by friendly and helpful volunteers and is abounding in wildlife. On the day I visited it was not possible to explore everywhere as much of the grounds were under water due to heavy rain and the flooding at the confluence of the rivers Tame and Trent. One of the more moving corners was the memorial to the Shot-at-Dawn soldiers of WW1, a collection of vertical stakes driven into the ground and facing the rising sun. The aim of the arboretum is: *'To honour the fallen, recognise service, and foster pride in our country'*

All the venues I have mentioned in this article give free entry and are supported by charity gifts and donations from visitors. Worth every penny of what ever you chose to give.

GELLIGAER JOURNAL 2013

Gelligaer Historical Society will once again publish a journal in September. We already have stories from Brithdir village, a continuation of the history of Bargoed Rugby club, and of the 18th century yeoman family into the 19th century. If you have, wish to write or know of an article that may be of interest to local historians and could be included please let us know.

Website of interest to readers with ancestors who worked in the coal industry

<http://dis-ind-soc.org.uk/en/press-and-media.htm>

Some readers of *Gelligaer Times* may have attended the September 2012 meeting when Dr Ben Curtis spoke on *The Wilson government and pit closures in south Wales, 1964-1970*. This link will take you to an article, *The Price of Coal* by Dr Ben Curtis, which appeared in no.38 (March 2013) of *Your Family History* magazine.

Another website with item that may interest readers of Gelligaer Times.

Sheila Little (formerly Sheila McCarthy of Bargoed) has drawn attention to the web site that her son in law found whilst browsing the net in America.

Go to www.dailyonder.com and type in **Life After Coal in Wales** --- some interesting text and videos as communities in Appalachians (USA) where mining is on the downturn are looking for solutions in Wales.

HELP WITH A PROJECT

Some members may know that Ewart Smith is researching the Lewis' school, Pengam. Ewart gave a talk to the Society a few years ago which was well received. Since then his research has progressed and I gather it is almost at an end. However Ewart would be interested to hear from anyone who has knowledge of any school photos that were taken by D. H. Riden of Bargoed. If you are able to help then please contact David Mills via the GHS website.

NEW PUBLICATIONS

Monty Dart and William Cross have recently produced two books, as co-authors. The books are about two members of the Morgan family of Tredegar House. The titles are: "Aspects of Evan" and "A Beautiful Nuisance - The Life and Death of The Honourable Gwyneth Morgan". Apart from the main characters the books contain some interesting details about their ancestors. Evan was, to say the least, an eccentric playboy who was interested in the occult, but also had a senior lay position in the Roman Catholic Church. He faced a court martial during the Second World War because he disclosed details of carrier pigeons to two girl-guides; it sounds almost like a Blackadder comedy sketch but was treated very seriously by the authorities. Gwyneth's body was found in the River Thames at London in 1924; she was involved with a notorious London drug dealer. Having read both books I can recommend them to anyone who is interested, not only in the Morgan family, but also the 1920s and 30s lifestyle of the wealthy upper class. The books are available on Amazon and at Tredegar House; however if anyone is interested please contact me via the G.H.S. website and I will contact the author about a direct purchase.

David Mills

If you have something that might be of interest to our members and could go in the next Newsletter please contact David Mills.

DON'T FORGET

7.00 pm Wednesday April 24th Moorish Spain

A look at eight centuries of Moorish rule in the Iberian Peninsula, from the period of post-Roman Visigoths to the year Columbus sailed to Asia but "discovered" the Americas. It was a key period for both the Peninsula and the Europe of its day, and has left an indelible legacy which is often overlooked. The three cultures - Christian, Islamic and Jewish - coexisted and collaborated, producing advances in fields such as science, engineering, medicine, art, architecture, philosophy, learning, cuisine and in trade and agriculture.

by **David Tolley**

David teaches Spanish and Spanish History at a number of universities live and online. He also works as a private tutor of Spanish, as a translator

7.00 pm Wednesday May 29th Pontlottyn Murder in 1925

Looks not only at a tragic event in 1925 but also examines the impact of the first Senghenydd disaster and WW1 on those who figure in the murder story. I also look at how the popular press dealt with the murder and trial.

by **Iris Owens**

One of our members

7.00 pm Wednesday June 26th Annual General Meeting

followed by a short talk from Ystrad Mynach based artist **Gigi Jones**

Gigi Jones was one of the collaborators on the "Common Sence" exhibition which was recently at Bargoed library. The subject of the exhibition was inspired by the beautiful landscape and rich history of Gelligaer and Merthyr Common.