



Gelligaer Times

Newsletter of the Gelligaer Historical Society

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www.gelligaerhistoricalsociety.co.uk

December 2013

Message from the Chair

There is a weather theme running through the 2013 messages from the chair: in March I referred to a severe storm in the area in March 1916 (which was almost replicated in 2013) while in the summer I commented on the Mediterranean heat we were experiencing. Now, I draw your attention to the centenary of a tornado that had devastating effects on the western part of Gelligaer Urban District as witnessed by photographs like that of Hylton Terrace, Bedlinog, included in the fine collection on <http://www.alangeorge.co.uk>.

October 2013 also marked the centenary of the Senghenydd Explosion, the UK's worst mining disaster, and, no doubt you saw how this was marked in the community in news items. I take this opportunity to remind readers of the tremendous achievements of the volunteers in Aber Valley Heritage Group which can be seen in their museum at Gwern Avenue, Senghenydd (CF83 4HA) and on <http://your.caerphilly.gov.uk/abervalleyheritage/>.

You will read elsewhere in this issue of *Gelligaer Times* of GHS's very successful involvement in the exciting Roman Archaeology project in Gelligaer during September. Recent GHS meetings have been well-attended, testimony to the interesting programme drawn up by Dave Mills. Shortly after the October meeting, I read an article in *Western Mail* on *Y Plas: The Story of the Welsh Country House*, a book co-authored by Mark Baker, who told us so much not only about Ruperra but also about other houses in Wales and England.

Details of our December meeting appear in this issue of *Gelligaer Times* and I hope the varied programme for the evening offers something to please all tastes. I also remind you that in January 2014 we are experimenting with a morning meeting. Perhaps some of those present may wish to purchase lunch at Llancaiach Fawr after the talk is over.

Details of our one day conference, moved from its usual October position to March (2014), will be available early in 2014. If you haven't already done so, perhaps you would like to put the date, Saturday March 29 2014, in your diary now.

GHS's World War I Project continues. Thanks to the meticulous efforts of Greg, our webmaster, the website www.gelligaerhistoricalsociety.co.uk has been updated and includes our database of names on local war memorials. This database is a *work in progress* and if you are able to help with any information or photographs please contact the website or email me at chairman@gelligaerhistoricalsociety.co.uk. We plan a 2014 journal, *Gelligaer* Volume 21, to commemorate the life and work of local people whose lives were changed by that horrific war. I will be grateful if you are able to email me with your contributions by December 31 2013.



Season's greetings from *Annie*

Gelligaer Historical Society Bags continue to travel. This photograph shows a GHS bag resting on a bench against the background of London's Tower Bridge opening to allow a ship through.

Did you know that it took 8 years, 5 major contractors and 432 construction workers to build Tower Bridge?

If your GHS bag has been to any interesting places close to home or in more distant locations, please send the editor a photograph for inclusion in the next issue of *Gelligaer Times*.

Did you know?

Did you know that actor David Jason has a family link with our area?

The recently published story of his life mentions that, while his father was a Billingsgate porter, his mother was from Wales. Press reviews mention that the young David Jason and his family visited a Pontlottyn described as *a place of sulphur mines*.

Gelligaer Roman Event Week 17th to 20th September 2013

During the summer months representatives from the society attended a series of meetings organised by the Caerphilly County Borough Council in connection with their planning application to extend the cemetery at Gelligaer. Also present at the meetings were Dr Peter Guest and Tim Young (Geophysicist) who had, on behalf of the Council, undertaken some trial excavations and geophysical surveys at the site. Representatives from, CADW, the National Museum, GGAT and the Winding House attended the meetings. Council Officers were also present. The outcome of the meetings was that the Council decided to organise a Roman awareness week at the Church Hall, Gelligaer, Children from four local schools attended (one school a day) and were given the opportunity of a "hands on" approach to learning about the Romans. The schools involved were Greenhill, Gelligaer, Ysgol Penalltau, Derwendeg, Cefn Hengoed and Glyngaer.

Each day the children were divided into groups and rotated between:-

Handling Roman objects, assisting with the Geophys survey, making mosaics and searching for artefacts in a sand pit. (Graham Oxlade and Mal Jones kindly allowed some of the finds to be taken back to the schools). They were also allowed to try on Roman uniform.

Clive Andrewartha and David Mills attended as general assistants and Mal Jones and Graham Oxlade brought along some Roman finds for the children to look at. Graham also dressed up as a Roman during certain times of the day. The owners of the Rectory, Mr & Mrs Aubrey, had kindly agreed to David Mills's request that the children be allowed to march on the Rectory lawn, it being part of the original parade ground of the Roman Fort. Unfortunately, because of the weather and time restraints this only happened on one day. However, for the first time in 1600 years Roman marching orders were heard on the parade ground as Graham Oxlade put the children through their paces. It is safe to say that the children enjoyed every day. Amongst the Roman household utensils that they were allowed to handle there is no doubt that the favourite one was the stick with a piece of sponge attached that Romans used as part of their visits to the lavatory.

On the Friday afternoon/evening the event was opened up to the community. Clive and Graham took people on a walk around the village and the fort. Afterwards Dr Guest and Tim Young gave a talk in St. Cattwg's Church about what had been going on during the week and what will happen after the geophysics results have been studied. Finally thanks should be offered to Victoria Lewis of Caerphilly County Borough Council who worked so hard in getting this event organised. She went on maternity leave a few days after the event had taken place !!

David Mills

Archaeological investigation at Llancaiach Fawr, November 2013

Between Tuesday 5th and Friday 15th November, members of the Society acted as volunteers and assisted Mr Jim Turner of Cardiff Archaeological Unit in carrying out a small dig at the rear of the house in advance of building work. Excavation to the base of a cellar was through mainly disturbed ground with little stratification. There was a well constructed stone drain at cellar level. There were numerous finds, mainly 18th and 19th century, but some possibly Roman. Further details will be available once the finds have been cleaned and catalogued.

Clive Andrewartha

Two important notices

December Meeting – Wednesday 11th December 7.00 pm

Three short talks have been lined up.

Dave Mills, who has been writing a book on the family at Maesrududd (now the Maes Manor) will speak briefly about the project and show some pictures which he could not include in his book.

Geri Thomas (whom you will remember from the singing group the Chartists last January) will talk about his Chartist ancestors.

Neville Davies will talk about nature and Judith, whose family has farmed at Clawdtrawscae since 1840, will bring along some of her old maps.

January Meeting – Wednesday 29th January 11.00 am

A morning meeting so you won't have to brave the cold night air.

Rosemarie Williams who was the last person to live in Llancaiach Fawr will talk about her experience of living and farming at Llancaiach Fawr. Did she ever see the ghost !?

Lunch may be had at Llancaiach Fawr afterwards. Please let Diane or Annie (but not both) know if you plan to have lunch (just to ensure the kitchen is well stocked if many are going to eat).

Remembrance Parade, Whitehall, November 10th 2013.

This year I had the honour of being one of five officers selected by Gwent Police to attend Whitehall to march on the parade and represent the Police.

We were part of a 180 strong contingent also represented by the Prison Service, Fire Service, St John Ambulance and several other organisations. The Sunday morning started very early for us with breakfast at 6am followed by drill practice during the morning, and the three instructors did a fine job of ensuring we marched in straight columns, could turn right and left properly, halt, stand at ease or to attention.

Soon it was time to march out from under the arch in Whitehall and into the public gaze. So, in full tunic uniform with our medals proudly displayed, we marched down to the Cenotaph and stood to attention on the right hand side with the public behind us and the Guards and Bands in front of us.

I have worked on local parades every year but this one felt different, my throat choked up more than ever with the brass band music being played and the masses of soldiers from the different services all lined up immaculately dressed in full uniform.

We were very lucky with the weather, a little cold but dry. As the service progressed onto the two minute silence I recall that the only sound to be heard was from the leaves falling during the light winds – a beautiful feeling and allowing time to reflect for a few moments on why we and everyone else was there that day.

After seeing the Queen and other Dignitaries lay the wreaths, the Veterans, their representatives and family members began to parade past the Cenotaph. This went on for some time, and what a proud moment it was to see those brave persons walking past in front of us, their heads held high and knowing they did a sterling job during horrendous conditions. It really makes one think that if it wasn't for these brave men and women that we would be living in a very different culture today.

By this time we had been standing on the spot in a *stand at ease* stance for over two and three quarter hours. I could not feel my legs, and my back and shoulders were aching quite uncomfortably – but I remember thinking at that point, what right have I got to feel uncomfortable and in discomfort when these brave souls had given so much more. It puts things a little into perspective and I felt that it was the least I could do to show my gratitude and support.

This was a once in a lifetime opportunity for me and one that I shall cherish in my heart for ever. It has certainly made me look more deeply into Remembrance Day.

Neu Davies. 2013.

From Dowlais to Bargoed via Hughesovska - SeptemberTalk

The Society's first talk of the 2013-2014 season was delivered by David Cartwright, who explained how Donetsk in Ukraine, now a city of a million people, was basically created out of nothing by Welshmen. They included a number of pioneers with connections to the Rhymney Valley including David's grandfather, Percy, who later became a newsagent in Bargoed. David was able to entertain the audience, not merely by repeating facts and figures, but also by adding some very personal touches about his grandparents and also his father.

Donetsk's original name was Yuzovka, a corruption of Hughesovka: 'Hughes Town'. 'Hughes' was John Hughes of Merthyr. Born in 1815 he made his fortune at the Millwall Engineering Company in London. This brought him into contact with the Russian government which offered him the rights to exploit major iron ore and coal deposits in the Donbass region in the heart of the barren Russian Steppe.

Hughes's project, the New Russia Company, coincided with a massive downturn in the iron industry in South Wales and Hughes was able to recruit 71 highly skilled workers from the valleys – including puddlers, miners, masons, boiler men, machinists and brick makers – to accompany him to the wilderness of Southern Russia in 1868.

They included Edward Watkins - a mechanical engineer from Rhymney; Willie Jones - a colliery engineer from Hengoed; and Annie Gwen Jones - a young, single woman from Fochriw who became tutor to Hughes's grandchildren. The skills of these Welsh pioneers enabled the New Russia Company to develop one of Europe's largest steelworks supplied by dozens of company-owned collieries. As the nearest metalled road was nearly 200 miles away, all the heavy specialist equipment – such as boilers and furnaces – had to be dragged sixty miles over the frozen Steppe by oxen.

Percy Cartwright – originally from Dowlais – went out to Yuzovka in 1903 at the age of 24 to become an analytical chemist at the New Russia Company's steelworks. He came back to Wales briefly to marry a local girl, Gwladys Morgan, in 1911. The couple returned to set up home in Yuzovka – a journey of more than three thousand miles – where they lived in a spacious home with servants, carriages and a troika. The New Russia

Company also provided a company hospital, an English school, an Anglican church (St David's, naturally), a tennis club, a golf club, a boating lake and even a fire brigade for their British staff who were also very well paid. A payslip for Edward Watkins of Rhymney revealed that he was earning 28 times the average UK salary.

While Yuzovka's population had ballooned to more than 50,000, the local population mostly lived in shacks built directly on top of spoil tips or in urban terraces where up to ten families would live in one-room homes with an open sewer outside. There were regular outbreaks of typhus, cholera, scarlet fever, smallpox and blackwater fever.

Unsurprisingly, when the Czar was deposed in the spring of 1917, the people of Yuzovka were among the first to join the Revolution. Just as quickly as it had been established, before the summer of 1917 was out, the Welsh community of Yuzovka was gone.

Gwladys Cartwright was one of last of the Welsh community to leave as she was heavily pregnant. She had to wait in Yuzovka until giving birth to a baby son, Edward, in July 1917.

Most of the Welsh community of Yuzovka lost everything. Thomas James of Cardiff, who had earned so much money in Yuzovka that he had been able to become a colliery owner, spent the remainder of his working life as a labourer in the repair shop of the Taff Vale Railway. Yuzovka's name was changed – first to Stalino and then Donetsk – and, as the returning Welsh community quickly dispersed in search of work, their story was largely forgotten.

Except in one household in South Wales, because baby Edward – the last person to be born in the Welsh community in Yuzovka and David's father – proved to be remarkably durable. A former captain of Bargoed RFC, he lived to the age of 95 but, with his death last year, went the last direct link to the Welsh community of Yuzovka. And so closed the final chapter of a truly remarkable Welsh adventure story.

Book launch at Lewis' school Tuesday 3rd December at 7 p.m.

Lewis School Pengam A History by Ewart Smith, hard back with dust sheet, price £20. Painting of the old school building at Gelligaer on the cover. 280 pages, 90 photos, mostly in sepia, some dated before 1900. Not just rugby/soccer teams but includes buildings and staff.
(Ewart can be contacted via ewartbsmith@btinternet.com)

Still to come

11.00 am Wednesday January 29th **Llancaiach Fawr** by Rosemarie Williams
Rosemarie Williams was the last person to live in Llancaiach Fawr when she farmed there.

7.00 pm Wednesday February 26th **Rhymney Tramroad North to South** by Tony Jukes

7.00 pm Wednesday March 26th **Pontypool Japanware** by Robin Williams

7.00 pm Wednesday April 30th **Tredegar Women-A Beautiful NUISANCE** by Willie Cross
Hon. Gwyneth Ericka Morgan, the only daughter of Courtenay Morgan, the third Lord Tredegar, was one of the Bright Young people of the post war era who disappeared from a house in Wimbledon in 1924 and whose body was later discovered in the River Thames.

7.00 pm Wednesday May 28th **Wales' 9-11 : what happened to the bodies?** by Lyn Pask
On September 11, 1878, within the Prince of Wales Colliery, Abercarn, there was a catastrophic explosion which killed 268 men and boys (though an exact number of casualties remains unknown). Only 12 bodies were retrieved leaving over 250 men and boys within the mine. Due to the ongoing fires within the mine it was sealed and flooded.

7.00 pm Wednesday June 25th Annual General Meeting followed by a short talk