



# Gelligaer Times

## Newsletter of the Gelligaer Historical Society

No 30

[www.gelligaerhistoricalsociety.co.uk](http://www.gelligaerhistoricalsociety.co.uk)

March 2014

### Message from the Chair

Thirty years since the 1984 Miners' Strike; while some readers may wonder where the time has gone, visitors and newcomers to the area find it difficult to imagine what this corner of north east Glamorgan was like in the heyday of coal. What hints are there for motorists travelling on the Bargoed and Gilfach bypass that they are on the site formerly occupied by Bargoed Colliery? Within the communities of Bargoed and Gilfach themselves, what indications are there of the lively social and economic community that grew so rapidly following the sinking of that Colliery? We can ask similar questions about other communities within the boundaries of the former Gelligaer Urban District – communities such as Pontlottyn, Fochriw, Deri, Bedlinog, Trelewis – and it is important to ask these questions now, before all the memories disappear.

As you read about the Society's activities in this newsletter, I hope you find something that interests you. And, if you have any information or questions about any aspect of the history of the local area, please contact us: Gelligaer Historical Society not only has a website ([www.gelligaerhistoricalsociety.co.uk](http://www.gelligaerhistoricalsociety.co.uk)) but is also on Twitter and Facebook.

Hope to meet you at our Conference (Saturday March 29) or at a monthly meeting (last Wednesday of the month, 7 pm at Llancaiach Fawr).

*Best wishes from Annie*

We wish Islwyn Hughes, our president, well in his new home at Millbrook House, Gelligroes Road, Pontllanfraith, NP12 2JU. No doubt he would welcome visitors.

### **Gelligaer Historical Society WWI Project**

The Society's World War I project continues.

1. Information is regularly being added to the database of names on local war memorials on the Society's website ([www.gelligaerhistoricalsociety.co.uk](http://www.gelligaerhistoricalsociety.co.uk)) and we have had useful feedback from a number of people, including former residents and family members.
2. A number of interesting and well-researched articles have been submitted for inclusion in the Society's commemorative journal. The next issue of the newsletter should contain details regarding the launch of this publication.



Sir John French Commander-in-Chief of the British Expeditionary Force for the first two years of World War I

Have you any interesting photo or artefact which might be included in our upcoming publication- please get in touch.

### Society Meetings

#### **December 2013**

The popularity of December's open evening continues to grow as a large group of members and visitors assembled to hear three short presentations. The evening opened with Neville Davies, a valued friend of the Society, speaking about some of the wide variety of plants and wildlife he has photographed on Gelligaer

Common. Then, member Geri Thomas recounted the fascinating story of his Chartist ancestor, concluding with a rendition of one of his Chartist folk songs. During the break, members and visitors browsed the displays and enjoyed a chat over a cup of tea and mince pies before the raffle was drawn. The evening was rounded off by Dave Mills who spoke on the research for his book about the Williams family of Maesrhuddud. Autographed copies of the book were available for purchase.

A successful evening like this does not just happen: it is the result of careful preparation and hard work. Thanks are due to the three speakers for very professional contributions. Also, thanks to Judith for arranging the refreshments and the raffle, and to Greg for his assistance with the PowerPoint presentations, as well as to all those who donated prizes for the raffle. The members' only raffle was won by Menna Hughes.

## **January 2014**

The Society broke new ground in January, when the monthly meeting opened at 11 am rather than in the evening. A large audience of members and visitors enjoyed Rosemarie Williams (the last resident in Llancaiach Fawr) speak of growing up in this historic house and farming the land. The meeting mushroomed into quite an event as many stayed to enjoy some social time over lunch in the Conservatory before about 15 went on a guided tour of Llancaiach Fawr.

**February 2014** - The Rumney Tram-road from North to South by Tony Jukes (Archivist at Oxford House, Risca)

Tony's talk on the Rumney tram-road was up to his usual high standard. With his extensive knowledge of this particular subject he could have talked for many hours, but time limitations meant that so much which could have been included had to be left out. The tram-road, and later a railway line, was in existence from 1826 until the 1960s when like other lines it was closed to passenger traffic; however stretches of the line continued for mineral traffic for some years. It was a lifeline for the Rhymney Valley for more than 140 years and Tony did well to cram its history into 90 minutes

We have to thank Tony and many others like him, who spend their lives researching local history, so that members of historical societies and other interested parties can listen to their talks, read their books and spend time in their company as they take the audience on a journey through time, treading the same paths as great engineers, ironmasters, politicians and entrepreneurs thus experiencing what they did and how they did it

For people like me who have a particular interest in this tram-road, and everything that went on around it, the work done by Tony makes my research so much easier. Although I have some theories of my own regarding the northern end of the tram-road between Pont-aber-bargoed and Rhymney, I look forward to Tony's publishing of a book on the subject.

*Bill Smith*

## **Still to come**

7.00 pm Wednesday March 26<sup>th</sup>      **Pontypool Japanware**      by Robin Williams

He will be bringing samples

7.00 pm Wednesday April 30<sup>th</sup>      **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 28<sup>th</sup>      **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 25<sup>th</sup>      Annual General Meeting followed by a short talk

## **And after the summer break**

7.00 pm Wednesday September 24<sup>th</sup> **The Antiquarian excavations at Caerwent 1899 – 1913** by Oliver Blackmore, Museum Curator, Newport Museum and Art Gallery

Over one hundred years ago the Caerwent Exploration Fund excavated the Roman town of Caerwent. The Fund's discoveries rank as some of the most important in Roman archaeology in Wales. Hear the story of the excavations, the characters behind them and the fantastic finds, which were donated to Newport Museum.

7.00 pm Wednesday October 29<sup>th</sup>      **German U Boats off the UK coast during WW1** by Alan Thorne

Alan Thorne, a well-known speaker on nautical themes, has previously told us about Pirates in the Severn Estuary.

7.00 pm Wednesday November 26<sup>th</sup> **Prichard Family & Llancaiach Estate** by Greg Buick

## Recent Publications

The following recent publications of local interest have been brought to our attention. If you know of any other books that may be of interest to readers of *Gelligaer Times*, please contact the website [www.gelligaerhistoricalsociety.co.uk](http://www.gelligaerhistoricalsociety.co.uk) for inclusion in the next newsletter.

### **The Williams Family of Maesruddud by David Mills**

The Williams family of Maesruddud played an important role in the social and economic life of North West Monmouthshire and north east Glamorgan over several centuries, and helped to shape the way in which some communities, such as Pontlottyn, developed. This 2013 publication, the result of many years of research in a wide variety of different places, by Gelligaer Historical Society member, David Mills, is a fascinating study of that family and their estate, told in a very readable manner. One of the strengths of this publication is the variety of sources used: to paraphrase a well-known lager advertisement, David's research reaches the sources that other historians cannot reach. Now that he has retired, we look forward to more publications by David.

### **The History of the Tredegar Mineral Estate by William Smith**

Another member of the Society has also been active on the book front. William (Bill) Smith has produced a book based on a narrative written in 1933 by **J. H. Thomas**, an employee of the Tredegar Minerals Estate Office at Cardiff. The original document was written over a two year period during 1933 and 1935. There were three volumes typed on an old style manual typewriter, they were bound but never really published, only a few copies were made. Mr Thomas laboured long and hard to produce the work which details the chief mineral leases granted by the Tredegar Estate. His work has existed for many years without anyone really having sight of it. This book is a must for anyone interested in the coal industry. The book does not however contain Mr Thomas' account of the Glamorgan leases (which include references to the Gelligaer area). But because the Bargoed Colliery shafts were on the Monmouthshire side of the river, most of the coal won in that colliery was under the Tredegar land in that County so Bargoed features in this book. Bill has spent many hours photographing and then transcribing the typed volumes. It is hoped that in the near future he will get around to producing a book on the Glamorgan leases which will include his own research on the Gelligaer area. But in the meantime enjoy what has been done thus far.

During last week I decided to carry out a tidy up of my books, I opened a copy of Volume 2 of the Gelligaer Historical Society Journal, printed in 1965. The contents list contained "*An Industrial Background (notes on the Tredegar Mineral Estate)*". The article was by the late Gethin Thomas. He wrote about the New Tredegar area and concludes his article by mentioning the "*manuscript entitled The Development of the Tredegar Mineral Estate by Mr J. Hopkin Thomas*". So nearly fifty years later members of the society, and others, can read the source of the article by Gethin Thomas. I know that Bill was not aware of the article because I was with him when he stumbled upon, and realised the significance of the books, on a visit to a local library.

*David Mills*

**Both books are on sale at Winding House, New Tredegar and Rowland's Newsagents, Blackwood OR BY contacting either Bill on 07557145739 or David on 07816604234. They will also be available at our conference on Saturday March 29th**

### **Lewis' School Pengam A History by Ewart Smith (Old Bakehouse Publications, 2013).**

What have Arthur Wright and Ewart Smith got in common?

1. They were teachers.
2. They have written books on the history of LSP.
3. They both studied at King's College, London.

Just as Ludovicans in 1929 welcomed Arthur Wright's book which marked the bi-centenary of the school, so today's Ludovicans are eager to delve into Ewart Smith's volume.

NB Arthur Wright's book can be read on <http://www.lewisschoolpengam.org.uk/schoolhistory.html>

### **Bargoed YMCA 75th Anniversary by Graham W. G. Davies (Old Bakehouse Publications, 2013).**

This volume, telling the story of Bargoed Y.M.C.A. through over three hundred photographs and text, is a must for anyone associated with the local Y.M.C.A.



Gelligaer Pit – photo Arthur Wright.  
Courtesy The Winding House.

## Edgar Evans, Bedlinog.

It is always good to have feedback on the Society's activities. The following is an extract from an email sent by a former Bedlinog resident after reading the article *Edgar Evans and the Communist Party in inter-war Bedlinog* which was included in Gelligaer Journal Volume XX published last September:

*Edgar, I knew as Edgar the Ironmonger and his car was special to us as children in Bedlinog ... a car being a rarity. When elections came up, either local or national from 1945, out would come The Car with a huge loudspeaker lashed to the roof. It was our Pied Piper. I even remember it had a throttle on the steering wheel. .... By the time I reached my teens the party was very small but next door but one lived John Boulton Thomas who had kept the faith. .... John Boulton used to give me the English versions of Soviet Monthly and other periodicals because they contained reports on athletics, training schemes etc. I related this when teaching in New York State and there was a sudden intake of breath from the class. Many had returned from Vietnam so were not teenagers. They could not understand that one of my friends lived in a Communist household; therefore I could be a potential enemy.*

## Update on the HLF funded project to improve access and interpretation at Llancaiach Fawr Manor

We have Heritage Lottery Funding (£943,200) and Cadw funding (£30,000) to help us carry out building works which will make the manor even more atmospheric and fascinating, as well as accessible to more people. The work is being carefully phased to allow the Manor to stay open throughout. We wanted to make sure that our visitors had the opportunity to understand what we are doing (new roof and reconstructed servants quarters, new and hidden heating and lighting, a new staircase tower at the rear of the building instead of the modern fire escape, opening up more fireplaces and windows etc), why we are doing it (for improved interpretation with more authentic interiors, reduced maintenance costs and lower fuel bills to make us more sustainable in the future and to attract more visitors to share this gem of a gentry house) and how we are doing it (by showing the crafts and trade skills being used by the builders and letting visitors have a go and providing informal talks to explain the processes).

We want visitors to have a glimpse into the work that goes into making sure that houses like this are able to remain open to the public and that they leave knowing more about everyday life in a gentry household in the mid 17<sup>th</sup> century and with a greater understanding of how houses were built and the skills and materials that were used, as well as the importance of keeping those traditional skills alive today to protect our historic buildings and allow people to continue to enjoy them for generations to come....it's just that it will be a little noisier than usual as Colonel Prichard has got the journeymen builders in to improve his Manor House!

Monthly 'Behind the Scenes' tours will be run by the contractors to take people into the areas that are normally out of bounds due to safety concerns whilst they are working. Places need to be booked early as they are very limited and the £3 fee per person goes to the fundraising appeal by the Friends of Llancaiach Fawr Manor for the furniture and objects for the servants attics- flat shoes and a head for height are likely to be needed! See the website for details each month.

*Diane Walker* General Manager | Rheolwr Cyffredinol

## Trips to Kew and Aberystwyth

The Blackwood branch of the Gwent Family History Society have organised two research trips, (by bus)

The National Archives at Kew on 12<sup>th</sup> April 2014 cost £26. From various pick up points  
and

Aberystwyth National Library of Wales on 17<sup>th</sup> May 2014 cost £15. Leaves Blackwood at 7.50 a.m.

Seats are still available --- For details of pick up points and times please contact [trips@gwentfhs.info](mailto:trips@gwentfhs.info)

## New Addition To Caerphilly County Borough Council Web Site

Readers may wish to know that a visit to the CCBC web site will reveal new section on Historical Research which contains a facility to help search for Birth, Marriage and Death Certificates. It can be useful in finding the date of such Certificates although the information displayed is limited and as yet not all years are covered.

## From the Cambrian Newspaper of 26th July 1834

*“I transmit the following extract from Iter Carolinum*

*16 July 1645 To Tredegar to dinner, Cardiff supper. Sir T Tirrell defrayed at the County expense*

*17<sup>th</sup> July Tredegar Sir W Morgan dinner*

*18<sup>th</sup> July Raglan dinner*

*22<sup>nd</sup> July Mr Moore’s creek near Black rock, raglan supper*

*24<sup>th</sup> July ditto slept at Newport*

*25<sup>th</sup> July Ruppera Sir P Morgan*

*29<sup>th</sup> July Cardiff dinner at the Governors at our own charge 7 nights there*

*August 5<sup>th</sup> Dinner **GLANCAYACH**, Brecon supper*

*It is stated in the last Merthyr Guardian that “in 1645, after the battle of Naseby, Charles 1<sup>st</sup> slept 3 or 4 nights at Llancaiach in Gelligaer from whence to Cardiff Castle where he remained 3 nights and that the curtains of the bed in which he slept at Llancaiach are in the possession of the Alderman of Cardiff”*

*I leave others the task of explaining the seeming contradictions between the two statements and remain Sir*

*Your Humble servant S S*

NOTE by David Mills: the full title of the book is “Iter Carolinum-Being a succinct relation of the necessitated marches, retreats and sufferings of His Majesty Charles 1st from January 10<sup>th</sup> 1641 to the time of his death in 1648, collected by a daily attendant on His Majesty”

I thought the letter quoted above, to an editor, would be of interest because of the links to Llancaiach Fawr. However, it prompted me into thinking it may be a good idea to develop a similar facility within this newsletter. Already mentioned in this newsletter is the feedback about the article on Edgar Evans. Please do not be afraid to submit letters or articles or photographs for the newsletter, all contributions will be gratefully received



Gelligaer about 300AD?