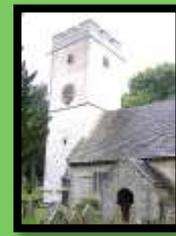




# GELLIGAER TIMES



## THE NEWSLETTER OF GELLIGAER HISTORICAL SOCIETY



Gelligaer Times first issue January 2006  
Tenth anniversary January 2016

### 10<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY EDITION JANUARY 2016

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## HAPPY ANNIVERSARY

## Message from the Chair

Traditionally the turn of the year is a time for reflection and, on that note, this 1979-80 GHS programme (thank you Terry for sending it to me) prompted me to think about the past, present and future of GHS. While I will leave you to think back over the decades, I enquire whether any other long-standing members have retained similar items. If so, please let GHS know and perhaps they can be copied into a future issue of *Gelligaer Times*. I am sure that it won't be long before an enthusiastic researcher will find them invaluable sources for a history of GHS.

As far as the present is concerned, membership is stable and meetings at Llancaiach Fawr continue to be well-attended.

Elsewhere in this issue of *Gelligaer Times* you can read reports on recent talks. GHS website [www.gelligaerhistoricalsociety.co.uk](http://www.gelligaerhistoricalsociety.co.uk) carries this year's programme, as well as further information about the speakers and their talks. The current strength of the Society is also evident within the Committee and in the ready flow of quality articles for the journal *Gelligaer*.

This issue of *Gelligaer Times* marks the tenth anniversary of the newsletter and Terry, who started this invaluable publication when he was Society Chair, has written about this elsewhere in this special tenth anniversary issue. Thank you Terry for starting this publication, and thank you Iris and Dave for developing it during your periods of editorship.

And prospects for the future of GHS are promising, as evidenced by the lively interest and debate about the proposed Diamond Jubilee Project. These discussions started at the AGM June 2015 and continued in the December meeting (reported elsewhere in this issue).

Finally, happy New Year to all readers, and special congratulations to *Gelligaer Times* on reaching this landmark, its tenth anniversary, as well as thanks to Terry, Iris and Dave for their invaluable work as editors over the years.

Annie

HISTORY ON YOUR DOORSTEP !  
A series of lectures presented by  
GELLIGAER HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
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1979  
Fri. 19th Oct. "MERCHANTS AND MARINERS OF CARDIFF,  
1660 - 1830"  
Mr. Philip Riden, M.A., M.Litt.  
Wed. 14th Nov. " TO BRITTANY WITH SAINT CATWG"  
Mr. D. Gethin Thomas  
Wed. 19th Dec. "SHRINE OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN AT  
PENRHYS"  
Miss Madeleine Grey, B. A.

1980  
Wed. 13th Feb. "BEDWAS AND MACHEN"  
Dr. Anthony Jukes  
Wed. 19th Mar. "CHANGES IN THE RHYMNEY VALLEY LANDSCAPE"  
Mr. T. McCarthy, B.Sc.  
Wed. 23rd April Annual General Meeting

Lectures are given in the Settlement,  
Bargoed, Commencing at 7.00 p.m.  
Annual Fee : One Pound  
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Further details from the Hon. Secretary:  
Miss A. M. Jenkins,  
21 Legions Way, Tel: Bargoed 832147  
Gelligaer.

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HAPPY 10<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY

## **Celebrating 10 Years of ‘Gelligaer Times’ - Terry McCarthy**

*Communications – the bane of modern living!* The opening words of the pioneer publication of *Gelligaer Times* in January 2006, words which still resonate and have relevance today in these days of *news* and information saturation. However, the expressed objective of the then new Gelligaer Historical Society publication is also still important, sufficiently so for Iris Owens and now David Mills as editors, ably assisted throughout by Greg Buick, to continue its compilation and publication to this day, ten years on from the first issue. Indeed, it is something I make a point of reading thoroughly when it arrives via the internet onto my computer, located now in the Fens of eastern England.

It was stated in January 2006 that *The aim of this new venture is to improve communications between the Society, its members and the wider community, including other organisations involved in some way with the research, recording and dissemination of historical material, particularly, but not exclusively, locally.* Furthermore, it was hoped that the publication, *possibly published quarterly, will keep the membership and others informed about the Society’s activities - meetings, excursions, publications and events.* I am delighted that the ‘possibility’ became a reality, even if pressure of work (with which I fully empathise) with more regular Journals means that it is not a quarterly publication.

It also stated that a *significant aim is raising awareness of historical issues, encompassing all aspects of historical expression. Hopefully this might include the generation of informed ‘pressure’ to bring to the ‘authorities’ notice of artefacts under threat – let us try to avoid repeating the destruction, without any public debate, on the scale of the nineteenth century core of Lewis School, Pengam, for example.* Thus the newsletter attempted to *emphasise the positive and offer support for historical projects, whether by volunteering to help, putting our collective hands in our pockets or simply showing interest and support– i.e. not always considering what a project can do for you, but what you can do for it!* As mentioned in 2006 and still very relevant today is that *to be effective, information is needed,* thus the membership and the public at large are still invited to send any information they view as being of interest to fellow historians to Annie, Greg or any member of the Society’s Committee.

So congratulations on the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of what I called *Gelligaer Times*, and may the next 10 years be even more productive. So keep up the good work and *Floreat GHS.*

### **HISTORY CONFERENCE March 19<sup>th</sup> 2016 at Llancaiach fawr**

**The price remains £12**

09.15 Arrival, registration of delegates : Tea/coffee (available for purchase from 08.45)

10.00 Welcome & Introduction to Day

**10.05 World War 1 Chapel Memorials in Glamorgan**

**Dr Gethin Matthews, Swansea University**

11.05-11.10 Changeover

**11.10 The Sacred Mountains of South East Wales Dr Edith Evans GGAT**

12.10-13.25 Light Buffet Lunch

**13.30 The Western – history and myth**

**Dr S McVeigh, Swansea University**

14.30 Tea/coffee

**15.00 Industrial Merthyr**

**Huw Williams**

16.00 Conference Ends

**Also still to come on the last Wednesday of each month - 7 pm at Llancaiach fawr**

February 24 <sup>th</sup>	The Lost Gardens of Trelewis A Study in Garden History	<a href="#">Graeme Moore</a>
March 30 <sup>th</sup>	The Chartist in Llanfabon	Brian Davies
April 27 <sup>th</sup>	<a href="#">Nantgarw Pottery</a>	Gwen Griffiths
May 25 <sup>th</sup>	Keeping the Home Fires Burning	Audrey Griffiths
June 29 <sup>th</sup>	Annual General Meeting	

**The Written Word – Iris Owens**

GHS celebrates 10 years of its newsletter this year. Why don't more people write articles for GHS publications? There are sure to be many subjects among the membership just begging to be written about. Why are we getting so few contributors? What is holding people (you) back? Is it lack of confidence or lack of practice?

At the risk of stating the obvious, we can only speak after a year or more of intense listening as infants. As formal education begins, we read then write. Through life, we continue this pattern on a daily basis: listening, speaking, reading and writing, with speaking far outweighing writing, both in quantity and clarity. Little wonder that so many people struggle to express themselves when putting pen to paper, or these days, sitting at a keyboard. We don't do enough of it. (The converse is also true, some brilliant writers are rubbish when standing on their feet in front of an audience.)

When it comes to writing factual articles for a newsletter, magazine or journal, people who are highly articulate and enthusiastic about their pet subject will often grind to a full stop. Over the last century journalists and business people have gradually realised that their writing does not have to impress. It has to deliver a message. We are not setting out to write literature, but structure and style are important. There are many old adages to help you: e.g. 'KISS' - keep it short and simple. Don't over-do subordinate clauses. A mix of long and short sentences will keep your readers interested. Too many commas will sound like hiccups when you read your piece aloud.

*A picture is worth a thousand words.* Don't describe it if you can show it.

Always remember your aim. Is it to inform, explain, instruct, motivate, or entertain your readers? Remember your readership. Are they interested in your subject? Are they knowledgeable about it? Are there words or concepts you may have to explain? Did their formal education stop at 16, or have they got a PhD? Don't over simplify. If it is too simple, it will sound like *Noddy*; if it is too complex, readers will lose interest.

Have you been given a word limit by the editor? Keep to it. Far better to edit it yourself. Have a plan: aims, readership, topics, conclusion and possibly, recommendations. Save writing your introduction until last, then you may be sure the main body of your text and the introduction tie up.

Write your first draft in one sitting then leave it for a day or two. Revisit your text and edit ruthlessly. With word processing, grammar check and spell check facilities, there is no excuse to founder on these rocks.

Show it to at least two other people - ideally one who shares your interest and one who does not. Insist on feedback especially on grammar, clarity and style. Edit again.

Read it aloud. Edit again.

If you are really keen on improving your readability check out *Readability* on Wikipedia which has much useful discussion on the subject. My personal favourite is the Fog Index formula as devised by Robert Gunning. It's easy to use and examines the correlation between word length

and sentence length. The bottom line gives the number of years of formal education your reader needs to understand your piece.

Much has been published on grammar and style and, although written some years ago, I still find Ernest Gowers' *Plain English* a comprehensive guide to both. Greville Janner's *The Art of Letter Writing* provides useful tips which can be applied to articles as well as letters.

In my short time as editor of *Gelligaer Times* I tried to apply the guide-lines outlined above, both in my own writing and when receiving articles for publication. The society is well-known for its books, journals and newsletters, but it is often the same people who contribute articles and long may they continue. A wider range of topics from new contributors with their special interests and own style would make for more varied reading matter, keeping our Society lively as we move forward into the next 10 years of *Gelligaer Times*.

*The editor is waiting for your article.*

A note by the current editor

I intend to keep this short and sweet, although I have not set myself a limit! I wish to thank Terry and Iris for the time they spent in editing previous *Gelligaer Times* and their contributions/articles that appear in this edition and in previous editions. I reiterate Iris' comment - *I AM WAITING FOR YOUR ARTICLE*. It would be remiss of me if I did not thank Greg, not just for the time he spends helping me with the newsletter, but for maintaining the website; because without it the newsletter could not be distributed and made available to such a large number of people.

One thing that has particularly pleased me over the past few years is the involvement of schools. Mike Oliver of Lewis' School has, again, sent an update on what is happening at Lewis'. The pupils and staff of Hengoed Primary School have also elected to become associate members of the Society and this, in my view, is the way forward for the Society.

Finally, my thanks to everyone who has submitted articles for the newsletter over the years. You do not have to be a member of GHS to send an article or an announcement of something that may be happening in an organisation in which you are involved. I sincerely hope I am achieving the aims of the newsletter as expressed by Terry in the second paragraph of his note that appears above.

*YMLAEN GELLIGAER*

David Mills

**Centenary Celebrations – St. Peter's Roman Catholic Church, Bargoed.**

**Terry McCarthy**

On Saturday 5 September 2015, I was privileged to be invited and attend the Centenary Celebration Mass at St. Peter's Roman Catholic Church in Bargoed. Having been 'my' church for a couple of weeks short of 38 years, I required no second bidding to attend this auspicious event, along with a large number of my former, fellow parishioners; a 93 year old gentleman baptised in the church, who travelled, by bus, from Merthyr Vale, There were a number of guests, including Wayne David, MP, Jeff Cuthbert, AM, the Mayor of Caerphilly County Borough Council and other local politicians, at least two of whom could claim a connection with the church.

The picture on the right shows the members of the Clergy in attendance at the Celebration Mass, celebrated by His Grace Archbishop George Stack (in the centre of the group). He was supported, on his right, by Father John Harrington, from Nottingham, who attended St. Peter's as a boy in



1940, and Father John Phillips Priest in charge at St. Peter's, and to his left by Father John Kelly of Caerphilly and Father David Gummett from Roehampton.

The Mass was accompanied by a range of hymns, the last of which, plus the musical settings for the Mass, had been written by Mrs Sian Jewell, wife of Anthony the long-time organist. His Grace Archbishop Stack gave the homily, focusing upon the changes the church had experienced since the building was built in 1904, as Trinity Chapel for Congregationalists. and purchased by the Diocese, then of Newport, in 1915. He indicated that St. Peter's was a few months older than the Archdiocese of Cardiff, established in 1916. Also considered were the significant societal changes seen in the area over the past 100 years and the major world events, which often accompanied or provoked them.

All too soon the religious celebration was over, photographs were taken, encouraged enthusiastically by His Grace! A display of some of St. Peter's Baptismal and Wedding records proved a great attraction for many parishioners, old and young after Mass ended! For many of us, there were lots of old friends to greet and speak to, pleasurable activities which continued for some time after the end of Mass while sharing the customary, generous and filling St. Peter's *al fresco* buffet! (Even the rain held off while we ate and talked!) During this time, the years rolled by, memories were shared and many were the enquiries after each other's families. There were a few notable absentees, including: Deacon Philip, who died in mid-August aged 92, thus missing, by a short time the celebration of a church he had done so much to support. Also, Margaret Knight of Park Road, now in her 95th year, but too infirm to attend the service; nevertheless she enjoyed the piece of celebration cake with which she was presented after proceedings had ended!

So ended a delightful day of celebration, enlivened by meeting many dear friends and neighbours, which made the 06.20 am departure from Peterborough very worthwhile.

Further details of this event can be found on <http://www.peoplescollection.wales/users/830>

### **The Joys Of Singing.**

When Annie asked me to write a note about the choir I currently belong to, I wasn't sure quite what was wanted, but here goes.

I seem to have been singing most of my life from junior school, through grammar school, church and into my adult life (please do not ask me to give you a solo – the consequences could be dire!)

In November 2010 thirty-five ladies decided to form a new choir under the baton of Mr David Lewis. At one time we had fifty-three choristers, but lost a number for a variety of reasons. We currently have around forty members. The choir is called **The Phoenix Singers** and we meet on a Thursday evening at Abercynon Community Hall. Our choristers cover a variety of ages from 17 to seventies, and a wide selection of jobs – teachers, accountants, office workers, shop assistants and, of course, some retired. Choristers live in Rhymney Valley, RCT (including Aberdare) and Merthyr. Our repertoire is very varied and includes songs from the shows, traditional Welsh songs, classical – you name it, we probably sing it!

Although our Musical Director works us hard, we have a lot of fun too. Leading up to Christmas we had five performances planned, including singing at the switching on of the Christmas lights in Pontypridd and joining the children of Perthcelyn School in a concert in Mountain Ash. Please take a look at our website [www.phoenix-singers.org](http://www.phoenix-singers.org) which will tell you the benefits of belonging to a choir. So, ladies, if you have two hours to spare on a Thursday night I'll be delighted to give more information.

*Pat Davies*

## VISIT TO THE FIRING LINE

*The Museum of The Queen's Dragoon Guards and the Royal Welsh*



On 9<sup>th</sup> September 2015 a group (16 in number) of members and friends of the Society assembled outside the gate of Cardiff Castle where they were met by Major Howard Smith, a former pupil at Heolddu Comprehensive School, Bargoed. Howard took the group into a reception room within the museum and “refreshed” them with tea/coffee and some very entertaining anecdotes, as well as giving the visitors an informative outline about the work done at the museum. The group was taken on a tour of the exhibitions in the museum which was made all the more interesting by the extremely detailed commentary provided by Howard. This was so much better than simply reading the notices alongside the exhibits, which are themselves informative, but not quite as good as Howard’s commentaries. The Museum and staff are very proud of the involvement of the King’s Dragoon of Guards in the battle of Waterloo (1815) and, in memory of the brave stance by many who lost their lives at Waterloo, a dinner is held every year on 18<sup>th</sup> June.

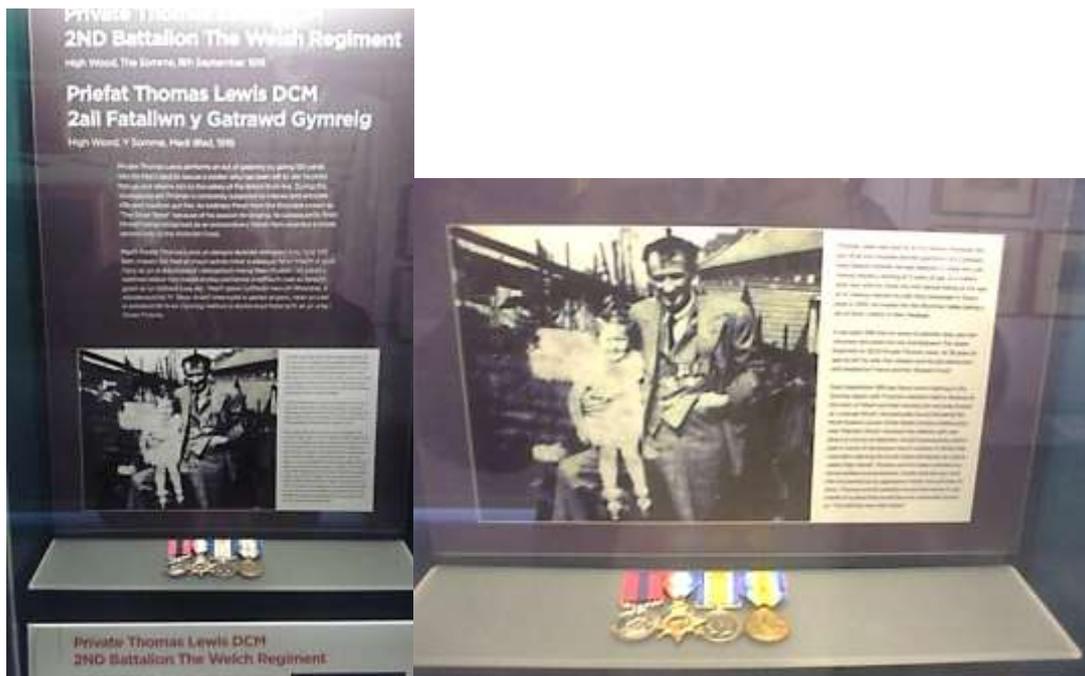
The photo on the right shows Major Howard Smith (facing the camera) talking to some of the group at the Waterloo exhibition (thanks to Carwyn Hughes for the photo). However, the museum is not just about *older* matters: there are exhibits showing the involvement in modern campaigns

The photograph that appears below is part of the display on Victoria Crosses. As can be seen, this part of the display contains seven medals that were awarded following the Battle at Rourke’s Drift, which took place during the Boer War in South Africa





The next photographs are of a display showing the medals awarded to Tom Lewis of Brithdir during WW1. The story of Tom Lewis written by Phillip Campbell Smith appears in the Society's *Gelligaer Journal* - Volume 19 (2012)



The visit to the museum would have been an interesting visit in any event, however the personal touch provided by Major Howard Smith made this a memorable event which was thoroughly enjoyed by everyone.



**News From Lewis' School, Pengam - Mike Oliver**

## **The Alun Lewis Project**

In July the school had the honour of unveiling a portrait of arguably the greatest poet of the Second World War, Alun Lewis. The reason behind this was the one hundred year anniversary of the poet's birth. Lewis, who taught at the school in 1939, before enlisting in the British army, is the much revered poet and writer whose life was cut tragically short in 1944 in Burma. The school engaged in three separate projects celebrating this great Welshman's life, the first being a short film made by our 6<sup>th</sup> form pupils Liam Gough, Rhys Jones and Jack Nicholls and featuring Shawna Workman and Josh Coles based on the poem *Destruction* which was written by Lewis during the time he lived in Hengoed. The second was a musical offering combining his words and their music by three of our pupils Josh Price, John Griffiths and Lewys Meyrick. The final aspect of our celebration of Lewis' work was the portrait by Cardiff-based artist, Dan Peterson, which now adorns the English department's wall in the 'street' named after Alun Lewis himself. The picture is accompanied by the poem *The Flower* which Lewis wrote for the school journal in 1939. This has also been made into a short film with Year 7 pupil Lewis Evans reciting the poem. Professor John Pikoulis, Lewis's biographer and a man who has worked tirelessly to preserve the memory of Lewis and his work, did the unveiling. It was a wonderful evening and thanks go to Laura Taylor Head of the English department, Sharon Price Head of Art, and Bethan Jenkins and Rosie Long from Music for their enthusiasm and efforts in making it so. Our pupils will also study the works of Lewis over the coming years; it has just been put on the WJEC English A-Level curriculum.

### **The Unveiling**



## Association of History Teachers in Wales

*Prize: £500*

### ***LEWIS SCHOOL PENGAM***

#### ***Yesterday Never Returns***

The Welsh Heritage Schools Initiative rewarded our work on WW1 this year; pupils Liam Gough and Rhys Jones attended the glittering award ceremony at the National Museum in Cardiff and accepted the award on the school's behalf. The citation stated that

*The content is original in that it focused on finding out about names on a badly-worn WWI Memorial Plaque at the school. This extended to looking at the role of Morgan Jones, a conscientious objector and, later, a Member of Parliament for Caerphilly. The project provided pupils with a vivid picture of life as a soldier in WWI and the community they came from, especially the role of women. The varied and impressive presentation comprises booklets, films, oral recordings, renewal of a memorial, presentations to community groups and primary schools and, above all, a drama, 'Yesterday Never Returns'. The project has been widely shared in the locality and involved impressive links with local organisations and community groups.*

It was especially rewarding for us, as a huge part of the project was intergenerational and gave a genuinely unique experience to our pupils and school community, particularly the trip to the Somme. Thanks go to Gill Levy of the Winding House, Dave Chamberlain of Caerphilly Arts, Kay David and Paul Williams, the authors of the two books mentioned. Also many thanks to the Heritage Lottery Fund for making all of this possible. Lastly the family of Morgan Jones, the staff of Lewis School Pengam and the late Arthur Wright, former Science teacher at the school, and the man who collected the letters from the trenches written by our pupils and around which the whole project was based.

On **TUESDAY 1<sup>st</sup> MARCH 2016 6.30-7 p.m.** a film on *Yesterday Never Returns*, by Clare Morgan Jones, will be shown at the school. All are welcome



## BOOKS and REVIEWS

### CUT TO THE HEART

It is a few years since, as we were leaving a GHS meeting, David Mills showed me a bundle of documents that prompted me to start research into the strange case of the murder of Marie Beddoe Thomas of Pontlottyn by her former sweetheart George Thomas of Bargoed. The research completed, secrets uncovered and data analysed, I continued the project by writing the book *Cut to the Heart* which tries to uncover the reason for this apparently open-and-shut case. *Cut to the Heart* looks at the lives of the protagonists and the lesser players including the families of George and Marie, with some dark secrets disclosed. It also recounts the lives of close friends, all of whom were shocked and saddened by Marie's untimely and violent death on the steps of Soar chapel, Pontlottyn, and George's trial, sentence and subsequent execution at Cardiff Jail.

Visits to Bargoed Library, The Winding House, British Library national newspaper archive (then in Colindale, London) and Glamorgan Archives, as well as interviews with residents of Pontlottyn, uncovered a fascinating tale. Being side-tracked by advertisements and articles in newspapers contemporary with the events helped rather than hindered the progress of getting into the zeitgeist of the 1920s, in Wales, Britain and worldwide.



Photographs from a wide range of sources livened the pages, always remembering the journalistic dictum: *Solid blocks of print weary the eye* and *A picture is worth a thousand words*. My daughter gave me huge assistance scanning the photos.

On completion of the book in draft form, I did not rush to publish but used an A4-computer print of it as a basis for talks around South Wales. These have proved surprisingly popular and have also generated additional information from audiences, which I subsequently incorporated into the text. (What a useful tool word-processing is!)

My original plan was to publish on-line only. With the popularity of eBooks and magazines and the drop in demand for paper copy, there are fewer book shops in high-streets now than for generations. I published my previous book, *The Nut behind the Wheel*, a first person, light-hearted look at the experiences of a rookie coach driver, in eBook form only through the online publisher *Smashwords*. There is no financial outlay and no garage or attic full of boxes of unsold books.

The subject of a murder with clear intent but no obvious motive remains the central mystery in *Cut to the Heart*. Based on the level of interest the subject has received when I have been giving talks, I have now decided to publish both on-line and in paper format. There remain avid readers who have not yet come to terms with reading from computer, tablet or Kindle despite the convenience of being able to store a whole library on an item which will fit in a handbag or large pocket, and the print size can be adjusted to suit the reader's needs. I realised it was necessary to move the explanatory notes from foot notes into the main body of the text to overcome the varying page sizes of an eBook when the font size is changed. This task my

daughter also did for me. Even among those who read eBooks, there remains a nostalgia for the look, feel and smell of a paper-based book. That is the next step and another with which my highly computer-literate daughter is helping. It is 90 years since the tragic murder of Marie Beddoe Thomas in December 1925. March 1926 marks 90 years since George Thomas was hanged, an opportune time to publish, I think. I am looking forward to publishing by Easter 2016.

Iris Owens

### PARISH OF GELLIGAER - THE FARMS AND THEIR FAMILIES, 1540 – 1840

Many readers of this newsletter will, I hope, be the owner of at least one of the books written by Greg Buick. Until he set his mind on producing this series of five books, the seminal work on the farms in the old parish of Gelligaer was the work produced by Professor T. V. Davies. However, not many copies of his work were ever produced. The work by Greg has surpassed the work of Professor Davies, not just in the availability of the research but also, in my opinion, in the tremendous amount of detail Greg has unearthed on every farm. The first volume was produced in September 2010 and the final volume (5) became available in September 2015. There are five volumes because there were five hamlets in the old Parish of Gelligaer, as Greg points out *Hamlet has a different meaning in Wales to that in England - in Wales it is a subdivision of a parish not a small village.*

Each volume contains a very detailed history not only of the farms but also of the people who either owned or occupied them. Greg has used a variety of sources to compile each volume but his primary sources were the Senghennydd Manor Survey of 1540 and the Tithe Award of 1840/41. However, he has used numerous other sources such as deeds, including those in Hanbury Archive (held at Gwent Archives, Ebbw Vale), Llancaiach estate records (in Dynevor Archive in Glamorgan Archives, Cardiff), and the Bute Archive (at National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth). However, it is not just the documents from these large estates that have helped Greg produce his books. His use of wills, inventories, records of court proceedings and family pedigrees give the reader an insight into many *ordinary* farmers who lived in the area. Greg has not restricted himself to the history of landownership and occupation: there are several interesting stories within each volume, for example there are notes on a feud (quite violent at times) between two families that encompassed two generations. Another story is about a farmer who shot, but did not kill, his neighbour; he ended up being transported to Australia but continued to correspond with his wife and daughter for nearly 40 years.

The photograph on the right is of the rear of Tir y Rhen, Farm which is to be found just north of The Cross Inn, Gelligaer. Greg traces the farm back to at least 1522. In 1725 the Morgan family of Tredegar House purchased this farm, along with several others, from the Gilfachfargoed estate owned by the Lewis family. In the 1841 Tithe Award two detached buildings are shown on the map, one of those buildings is the single storey building shown in the photograph. The *modern* two storey building which has been added to the end of the old building bears the typical feature of Tredegar Estate farms, namely the *Crows Feet* drip stones above the window; this feature can be seen on nearly every Tredegar farm house.



Greg is to be commended for the tremendous amount of time he spent in assembling this series of books, volumes which will be of use to historians for generations to come. Such is the interest in his work that a number of local farmers have purchased his books, which in itself is no bad testimony.

David Mills

*RENDER THE CHARTISTS DEFENCELESS* by Les James

Michael Sheen, stage and screen actor has written the foreword reflecting on challenges raised by the Chartists' struggle for today. In 1840, three Welsh Chartists were sentenced to death for High Treason. They were charged with conspiring and leading a rebellion in south Wales that ended on November 4<sup>th</sup> 1839 at Newport, when more than twenty men fell to the gunfire of the 45<sup>th</sup> Regiment. Due to public outcry, the Cabinet set aside the death penalty. John Frost, Zephaniah Williams and William Jones were transported for life to Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania).

When all three received full pardons in 1856, only Frost returned to Britain. Aged 72, and seeking to regain the political life he had *lost* 17 years earlier, Frost refused to be silenced. Invited by Ernest Jones to help revive a declining Chartist movement, he toured the country demanding the implementation of the Peoples Charter and scorning the aristocratic landed elite. At Primrose Hill, London he addressed 20,000 supporters.

Frost held the Lords Palmerston, Normanby, John Russell, and his oldest antagonists, the Morgan family of Tredegar Park (Newport), responsible for his mistreatment, exiling him and obstructing his return home. He lambasted their *agents*, such as Sir John Franklin, the Governor of Van Diemen's Land, and Captain Booth, the commandant at Port Arthur. Although he never mentions his name, the superintendent surgeon (Dr. Alexander McKechnie RN) aboard the *Mandarin*, was his main target.

Through Frost's letters and speeches, Les James explores Frost's changing view of McKechnie. Cured of seasickness, Frost admired McKechnie's professionalism and was pleased to be encouraged to write home. By the end of the four-month voyage to Hobart, Frost was deeply troubled. He was now alone. The bonds between the three Chartists were breaking. McKechnie was gleaning intelligence and interfering with their mail. Letters written to Morgan Williams, leader of the Merthyr Chartists, and Feargus O'Connor, owner of the *Northern Star* newspaper, never reached their destination. Frost never met the Doctor again, but brooded on what had happened on the *Mandarin* and afterwards. Did the authorities want him to die? Had McKechnie set up a mutiny plot to trick him? Frost was puzzled to know what McKechnie had gleaned from Williams and Jones about the abortive south Wales rising. From internet sources, Les James has created an *identikit* historical biography of a hitherto anonymous man. McKechnie climbed to a top post in the RN medical service at Haslar Hospital, Portsmouth, but his character remains a *mystery*. He left no diary, letters or papers, and there is neither obituary nor portrait to shed light on his life and appearance. There are just two impersonal medical journals (now at the National Archives).

Intrigue, skulduggery, entrapment – Frost was the victim of spies, informers and *agent provocateurs* ever after he became a prominent, national Chartist figure in 1839. Les James relates overlapping stories from locations across the world - in London, Wales, Australia and aboard the *Mandarin* and reveals an imperial political elite prepared to ruthlessly *Render the Chartists Defenceless*. Frost's political lectures were brought to an abrupt end in 1857 by

newspaper character assassination and political blackmail, in which Octavius Morgan MP played a significant role.

This is a limited edition of 350 numbered books. Available from *The Three Impostors at 3, Woodville Road, Newport, NP20 4JB. Price £10 inc. p&p. Payable by card/online or by cash or cheque.*

MERTHYR HISTORIAN, Volume 27

*Merthyr Historian*, launched in November 2015, is the 27<sup>th</sup> in the series to be published by Merthyr Tydfil Historical Society and has been produced under the editorship of Dr T. F. Holley, John Holley and Keith Lewis-Jones. Printed on high quality glossy paper it costs £10 and is available from Amazon. This is not a book which I sat down and read from beginning to end, but I can recommend it as one to *dip into*; just choose an article to read, and then another, and another . . . until half the day has passed. The wide variety of topics covers the whole of the old parish of Merthyr. As in all *Merthyr Historian* journals readers will find something to both interest and inform them. The articles are written by those whose names, in the main, are known to people interested in local history in the locality, some authors having written for the journal for many years, and the content is balanced between industry, culture, society and individuals:-

**Brian Davies's** long-standing interest in Dr William Price continues with his examination of Price's involvement in Merthyr's political history – commenting also on parallel political issues.

**Clive Thomas** makes a comprehensive exploration of the exploitation of coal by John Nixon at Aberfan, embracing discussion of the landscape and infrastructure as well as including many illustrations from his collection.

Studies of poets – of Charles Horace Jones and of Alun Gower Thomas – have been written by **Carolyn Jacob** and **Beverley Robins** and by **Mary Owen**, and **Innes Macleod** has written about the Welsh harper, Helen Hughes.

**Professor Brynley F. Roberts** has written a detailed commentary on printing and publishing, and in a further article lists (what to me appeared comprehensive, although Professor Roberts described it as *not a complete list!*) published books and periodicals in Merthyr Tydfil.

**Wilf and Mary Owen** have written about the Morgan Family whom Wilf describes as *gentlemen farmers* from north of the Parish. He then details their purchase of the Gwaelodygarth Estate and its subsequent development, Morganstown. Mary continues the story, writing an obituary of John Williams Morgan (1920–2014), and finally Wilf discusses the link between the Morgans and the Formans of Penydarren,

**Josh Powell** sees 1940 as *A remarkable Year* and has written well-documented personal memories as well as details of the war further afield for this year.

GHS 2015 conference lecture, *What has Merthyr Tydfil ever done for us?* is included. **Joe England** discusses the contribution which Merthyr people have made nationally and internationally, in the field of sports (sorry!), arts, including the choral tradition, band music, music composition, visual arts and acting, authorship (and historians!) and then develops his theme to concentrate on the entrepreneurship for which the town has become famous.

**Malcolm Kenneth Payne's** first contribution to the journal is an account of scouting in Merthyr Tydfil and details his memories while he was a scout there in the 1950s and 1960s, describing events, competitions and *bob-a-job* week, for example. In another article, entitled

*Evans's and Jones's of Dowlais iron and steel, coal, politics, law and medicine*, he writes about members of his family who worked in all of these fields in Dowlais and Merthyr Tydfil. In so doing he reveals much of background of their lives and contemporary events in the town.

**Dee la Vardera** writes about Merthyr-born Captain John Percival Morgan (RASC) and the Massacre at Civitella, 1944, the first chapter and some research for a book to be published in 2016.

In addition to a number of *before and after* photographs, **Lyndon Harris** has detailed the renovation of one of Merthyr's beautiful buildings, Vulcan House

Education has not been forgotten. *The Unlikely Birthplace of the Welsh Grammar School* was at Rourke's Drift argues **John Fletcher** who discusses how victory there led to an investigation into, and then development of, intermediate and higher education in Wales. There are also articles depicting personal memories, glimpses of school life at different times; Mary Owen at Cyfarthfa High and **Megan Jones, Christine Jones (now Trevett)** and **Angus Gwynne** at Quakers' Yard Grammar School.

**Caroline Owen** has written an account, *In praise of "the peoples' park" Thomastown Park - the first century*, and describes its development, an early example of restoration of tips and their use for leisure and recreation.

**Ivor Thomas Rees** has written of politics and MPs for Merthyr, describing men and events before and after the November 1922 election.

**Barrie Jones** has taken advantage of the 130<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy in 2015 to write a detailed account of the County Borough Treasurers.

Saron Chapel, Troedyrhiw, now demolished, is the subject of **Steven Brewer's** well-illustrated article in which he gives an account of the history of the chapel as well as the aims and activities of the volunteer group, *Friends of Saron*.

**Judith Jones** writes about the now *lost* village of Twynywaun and the fair which had been held there for many years. She briefly describes the landscape and history of the area before using several sources, although mainly newspapers, to depict the fair itself.

The articles all provide far more depth and extent of knowledge than the above very brief descriptions suggests; they also demonstrate thorough and detailed research and analysis. My only - very slight! - negative comment is in regard to the lack of an editorial, a feature which seems to have become a trend in local history journals now - although tribute is paid to Miss Sylvia Crawshay's forty years of commitment to the Society. I cannot complete this review without mentioning that it is the 22<sup>nd</sup> volume which Dr Holley has produced and the 23<sup>rd</sup> to which he has contributed; a (hard) labour of love! Fred, as he is known to his many friends, is also a faithful, well-known and a long-time member of Gelligaer Historical Society. Now a life member, he has served as our president, a committee member and a member of our editorial committee for many years. *Merthyr Historian* Volume 27 extends our knowledge of the history of Merthyr Parish, the place and its people, and I hope it will continue in this vein under new editorship.

*Judith Jones*

WILLIAM FOSTER GEACH - STEPSON OF AND SOLICITOR TO JOHN FROST

by David Mills

While historians and many general readers are familiar with the story of John Frost, the Chartist leader, few have much, if any, knowledge of the life of his stepson, William Foster Geach. But, no longer, as, written in the charming and distinctive style we have seen in his previous publications, David Mills' recent book (published September 2015) takes his readers through the twists and turns of the life of William Foster Geach.

David starts by explaining what ignited his interest in this amazing life story before moving on to present the results of his meticulous research. His narrative, supported by well-chosen extracts from a variety of both primary and secondary sources, and illustrated by appropriate scenes and portraits, takes his readers through a life that started in early nineteenth century Newport and ended on the other side of the world.

Having lost his father, William Foster Geach was still a child when his widowed mother married John Frost in 1812. By the 1830s, he was a Pontypool solicitor, and, as that decade gave way to the next, he was John Frost's solicitor at the trial for High Treason under a Special Commission held at Monmouth December 1839 and January 1840. Only months later, William Foster Geach was convicted for forgery and sentenced to transportation. But, the story does not stop there, as David has uncovered so much fascinating information about William Foster Geach in the Antipodes.

A long-standing and valued member of Gelligaer Historical Society, David has every reason to be proud of this volume in which, using his knowledge of legal procedure, he offers a remarkable insight into the life of William Foster Geach and the nature of contemporary society.

*Annie Owen*

### MONTHLY MEETINGS

GHS started its 2015-2016 session with a very successful visit to Firing Line Museum in Cardiff Castle (reported on elsewhere in this publication), two new publications, displays at both Winding House's Heritage Day and Ystrad Mynach Library,

#### SEPTEMBER – BARGOED RIOTS OF 1911

Dr Stuart Broomfield spoke to a sizeable audience of members and non-members on *Bargoed Riots of 1911*. There is a fuller account of the riots, as well as other interesting articles, including a history of the lost village of Troedrhiwfwch, in the Society's new journal *Volume 22* which, together with *Farms of Gelligaer parish Volume 5* (which includes studies of farms in the area from Bargoed to Ystrad Mynach) was launched that day.

#### OCTOBER - THE TRIAL OF JOHN FROST

David Mills spoke about the trial of John Frost - the Chartist leader. As with the September meeting another book launch took place, this time it was David's latest book entitled *WILLIAM FOSTER GEACH - STEPSON OF AND SOLICITOR TO JOHN FROST*. David explained that whilst researching William Foster Geach he had become interested in the Special Commission that tried Frost, and other Chartists following the march on Newport in November 1839. Before

dealing with the trial, he explained that the march was essentially a Monmouthshire event. However, there were a small number of Chartists from the Llanfabon and Nelson areas who participated in the march. Having met at The Collier's Arms (now known as The Rowan Tree) public house, Nelson, they marched via Maescywmmer to join the main body of marchers at Pontllanfraith.

David took us through some of the preliminary hearings that had taken place before the magistrates at Newport, and then turned to the trial at Shire Hall, Monmouth, which commenced 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> December 1839 before being adjourned to 31<sup>st</sup> December 1839. Throughout the legal proceedings, starting with the magistrates in Newport, and ending with the comments of Chief Justice Tindal, a theme was developed that the vast majority of the Chartist marchers had been misled or deceived by a small number of middle-class radicals, including John Frost, Zephaniah Williams, and William Jones.

John Frost was the first prisoner to be tried. Two of the most eminent barristers of the time, Sir Frederick Pollock and Mr Fitzroy Kelly, represented him at Monmouth Shire Hall. The drawing below, a representative drawing, appears with the permission of Newport Museum & Art Gallery. Sir Frederick Pollock can be seen standing, with his hand on his hip. William Foster Geach is on the right, sitting in front of the dock, which contains John Frost (facing the artist), William Jones (extreme right), and Zephaniah Williams.



John Frost was found guilty of High Treason on 8<sup>th</sup> January 1840, Williams and Jones were found guilty a few days later. On 16<sup>th</sup> January 1840 all three were sentenced to be hanged by the neck until dead, afterwards their bodies were to be beheaded and their torsos cut into quarters. This was the last time that such a sentence was pronounced in England and Wales.

David explained that Sir Frederick Pollock had raised, at the start of the trial, a seemingly unimportant point about the delivery of the lists of witnesses and jurors and the indictments. The statute decreed that three had to be delivered to the prisoners at the same time; but they were not. This point of law was reserved to fifteen Judges sitting in London, for three days at the end of January. By a majority of nine to six, they advised that the point raised by Sir Frederick Pollock was good (two of the three Judges who sat at Monmouth were in that *majority*). However, by a majority of nine to six (with two of the Judges who sat at Monmouth being part of the minority) they advised it had not been taken in time. All the Judges agreed that the conviction should stand. However, Sir Frederick Pollock and Chief Justice Tindal

eventually persuaded the government that the death sentences were unsafe. On 1<sup>st</sup> February 1840 the sentences were commuted to transportation for life.

#### NOVEMBER - JOHN HODDER MOGGRIDGE

A large audience attended to hear a presentation by the research group from Pontllanfraith History Society; Lyn Pask gave the power point presentation but the members of the group were also present, as were other members of the Pontllanfraith Society and also some of our friends from Fleur de Lys History Society. Additionally, Les James, the well-known historian on all matters involving Chartism, turned up to find out more about Moggridge's connections with John Frost and Moggridge's social experiment involving building houses for the workers at Blackwood, Fleur de Lys and Ynysddu.

The picture on the right (held in Gwent Archives) shows typical houses built under Moggridge's scheme. They are now demolished but were in Hall Street, Blackwood.



Lyn explained that there are many *stories* about John Hodder Moggridge and the research group had been set up nearly five years ago to find facts and recorded details of Moggridge, which may, or may not, support those *stories*. One of the many questions the research group set out to explore was why did John Hodder Moggridge sell the Boyce estate in Dymock, Gloucestershire, and buy land in the emerging industrial area of south Wales. They have carried out extensive research into the ancestry of Moggridge which reveals not just the names of his forebears but also, by studying a number of wills and court cases, how they “followed the money”.

In 1812 Moggridge sold the Boyce estate, which he had inherited from his father. He moved to Llanrumney Hall, Cardiff, the reputed home of the *pirate* Sir Henry Morgan. He then bought land at present day Blackwood from Mary and Elizabeth Morgan of The Priory, Caerleon, who owned Rhosnewydd Farm (the farmhouse is extant and now a public house - Monnington Lodge). Moggridge built, and lived, at Woodfield House, which is the other side of the river from Blackwood town. Lyn mentioned that the group has recently discovered that Moggridge bought the Rhosnewydd estate for £5000, but they were surprised to discover that the land had been bought by way of a mortgage, which remained in place until 1892.

In 1826 Moggridge wrote a paper about the ways of improving the living conditions of the labouring classes and he put this into practice by offering plots of land for rent. On the plots he allowed cottages/houses to be built. The buildings were not to be more than four in number and each had a reasonable size garden to produce vegetables. We were shown photographs of typical *Moggridge* houses (now demolished) at Hall Street, Blackwood and Castle Street, Fleur de Lys.

It is impossible in a short review such as this to convey the vast amount of data collected thus far by the research group. Their research is well worthy of publication ; so that the facts about Moggridge, his life, his interests, and his involvement with the establishment of Blackwood can at last be read by historians and anyone interested in Blackwood..

## DECEMBER 2015

The December 2015 meeting followed the successful format of recent years. The meeting opened with Dr David Williams reading from the memories of his great uncle, Rev Gwilym Thomas. The memories, written in the 1950s, shed light on many aspects of life and work as well as the appearance of the Bargoed area in the decades prior to the sinking of Bargoed Colliery. The sizeable audience was delighted and urged that the memories be published, possibly in *Gelligaer* 2017, to reach a wider audience.

Carwyn Hughes then took the audience on a trip to Alice Sainte Reine in north-west Burgundy, the site of a battle between Julius Caesar and Vercingetorix, the King of the Gauls. Caesar had declared that the rebellious Gauls had to be conquered once and for all. Carwyn's interest in this topic stems from his knowledge that when the Romans arrived at Gelligaer they built a concentric earth work called a contravalation. Carwyn pointed out that evidence still exists on Gelligaer Common of the practice earth-works laid out by the Romans. Similar tactics were used when they laid siege against the Gauls. Eventually the Romans defeated the Gauls and Vercingetorix was taken to Rome and executed some years later; from this time onward the Gauls aped the Roman culture in terms of dress, housing etc.

Not far away from the scene of the battle is the source of the river Seine which had been of religious significance to the Gauls; the Romans built a temple there dedicated to the goddess Sequana. Today a replacement statue occupies the site. In the 1860s the City of Paris purchased the site because of the importance of the Seine to that City. Napoleon III regarded Vercingetorix as a national hero and had a huge statue of him erected above the village, however Carwyn pointed out that the face on the statue bears a likeness to the young Napoleon.

Carwyn, and his wife Menna, recently visited the museo-parc built at Alise Saint Reine and their visit coincided with a life size exhibition of the comic book character, Asterix the Gaul. The book was first published in 1961 when six thousand copies were sold; that has risen to a present day figure of 50 million. Carwyn briefly explained how Asterix drank a magic potion, which enabled him to defeat the Romans in hilarious encounters. He concluded his entertaining talk by mentioning that when France needed a name for their first satellite Asterix beat all-comers.

On either side of the tea/coffee and mince pie break, the Diamond Jubilee Project was discussed. In summary there are three proposed projects:-

1. *Line of development --- e.g. education in Gelligaer parish from early times to present day.*
2. *Place/community – e.g. history of development of Hengoed and Ystrad Mynach.*
3. *Gelligaer parish in nineteenth century, the century of change from rural to industrial and semi-urban.*

Discussion will continue in the coming months and GHS will be pleased to receive your comments and opinions. The chosen project will be announced and the Diamond Jubilee Project launched at AGM 2016, so allowing four years for research before the results of the research are collated into their final form for publication November 2021.

Thanks to committee members Ann Pinch and Susan Price for assisting with serving the tea/coffee and mince pies, and to Judith Jones for her work (again) in organising the members' special raffle, won by Leighton Smart, and also the "open" raffle; thanks also to those who donated prizes for the raffles.

## Butetown -- Gelligaer or Cardiff's Tiger Bay?

Based on an interesting short essay recently sent to GHS by member **Martin Rees**.

Butetown is the name of two very different communities, one in the former Gelligaer parish on the northern rim of the South Wales Coalfield, and the other on the coast about 20 miles (as the crow flies) to the south. Butetown (Gelligaer) is near the source of the river Rhymney while Cardiff's Butetown is not far from the point at which that river enters the Bristol Channel, and between them, with sites of former iron works, coal mines and industrial communities of various sizes, is the industrial revolution in microcosm.

The two communities bear the name of the powerful landowning Bute family and owe their existence to nineteenth century industrialisation. While Butetown (Gelligaer) is the older development, today its buildings look much as they did nearly two hundred years ago. Butetown, Cardiff Bay, is probably better known outside the local area. People across south Wales (and the wider world) are far more likely to have heard of the Coal Exchange, Senedd (National Assembly Building), Tiger Bay or Shirley Bassey, than The Windsor Arms, St Aidan's Church and the residents of Collins Row in Butetown (Gelligaer). However, for BBC television viewers, both Butetowns have been seen in the last year or so: *Casualty* is one of a number of programmes filmed in part in Cardiff's Butetown and Laurence Llewelyn-Bowen explored the social history of a house in Gelligaer's Butetown in *Laurence's Extraordinary Ordinary Houses*.

### Butetown (Gelligaer)

There is no attempt to recount the history of Butetown (Gelligaer) here, as interested readers will find the excellent website <http://www.butetownhistory.info/en/> carries the results of detailed research into various aspects of the history of the community and the life of its people. The same website notes how, in the 1970s, when some other regions were destroying much of their industrial past, the important Butetown architectural and social heritage was recognised, its houses were improved (re-roofed and new windows) and, in 1975, European Architectural Heritage Year, the Prince of Wales visited the village.

<http://www.gelligaerhistoricalsociety.co.uk/index.php/plaques-ww1> carries a photograph of the war memorial plaque in St Aidan's church and results of some research on the three casualties.

### Butetown (Cardiff)

During 2015 GHS has made contact with Butetown History & Arts Centre, which dates from 1987, and there is a possibility that in the future, both organisations will work in partnership to produce material for an exhibition which will compare and contrast the settlements.

The Centre preserves archive material, including hundreds of photographs and memories of local people. It attempts, by way of a variety of changing exhibitions, to inform the public of the fascinating history of Cardiff Docklands. For details visit [www.bhac.org](http://www.bhac.org)

Butetown History & Art Centre, situated at the Mermaid Quay end of Bute Street, Cardiff



### Finally

While Butetown (Gelligaer) no longer has its museum, the village is one of a number of sites within the former parish of Gelligaer that is worthy of a visit. Nowadays, Butetown, just a stone's throw from the Heads of the Valleys road and on the edge of Brecon Beacons National

Park, is not only a desirable place to live but also a calling point for walkers, including those interested in exploring the industrial history of this part of south east Wales. Late in 2014, GHS was invited to contribute to discussion with the consultants on Butetown HLF Townscape Heritage Project, a project that is now in the hands of CCBC.

For some relevant illustrations see:

<http://www.peoplescollection.wales/discover/query/bute%20town>

<http://www.peoplescollection.wales/discover/query/butetown>

### Miscellany

The photograph on the right shows Menna Hughes looking wistfully at the island of Alcatraz and the infamous prison housed thereon. Could it be that the GHS bag she is carrying contains a file and hack saw to help Carwyn escape.



### Brian Davies and his Steam launch

A photograph appeared in the last newsletter showing Brian's retirement project (his boat) when having engineering work done at Nigel Brake's workshop at Penybryn. That work was completed a few months ago and the launch has been transported to Penarth marina for fitting out; hopefully a *launch of the launch* will take place within the next few months; when it will be *ALL ABOARD* for trips around Cardiff Bay

Arrival at Penarth Marina



**Walks in four parks.**  
**A wildlife article by Neville Davies.**

I was asked by Gelligaer Historical Society, who I have known for some time, if I would be interested in writing a wildlife article based on a visit to a few of the local parks in the Caerphilly County Borough area – this quickly changed to four in total, so without further ado, the aim was to write up something based on visits in December 2015 to Parc Cwm Darren, Bryn Bach Park, Penallta Park and the Bargoed Woodland walk. The weather was certainly a challenge but I managed to get the visits completed with some interesting species found. Read on to see what was on offer during this bleak, cloudy but mild December.

**Parc Penallta.** Based on the outskirts of the town of Ystrad Mynach and the site of a former colliery waste tip, typical of the South Wales landscape. Like all the parks I visited, they are now a haven for a wide variety of flora and fauna. I parked in the *pay and display* car park at the top of the park and reminisced about the Woodlark we had seen here back in September. I took the path that leads along the old route of the railway line past a small group of Marsh Marigolds that had finished flowering, but still showed the distinctive leaves. I was serenaded by a Blackbird and a Song Thrush, whilst Chaffinches flitted to and fro across the path. A pair of Bullfinches fed busily amongst the foliage of Blackthorn and Hawthorn. Several small clumps of Hart's Tongue Fern (a good indicator of limestone) grew in the clearings. Above the canopy the familiar *mewing* call of a Common Buzzard overhead made me look up where a Red Kite was also enjoying the same air, scanning their territory below, which when feeding can have a radius of over ten miles.



***European Robin and Rabbit* © ND**

Fungi were a bit thin on the ground but several groups of Clouded Agarics were spotted along with Honey Fungus, Common Puffballs and the ever present Turkey Tail – a bracket fungus found growing on the stumps of dead trees and so called as the shape resembles the fanned tail of a turkey. A small bird flitting through the branches caught my attention, feeding as if there was no tomorrow, small, delicate with a hint of a light green plumage, constantly moving and searching for tiny insects and invertebrates. This was a Chiffchaff, one of our *leaf warblers* that had probably decided to winter here rather than undertake the long journey back to West Africa. A Green woodpecker was making the *yaffling* call up ahead – a sign of rain perhaps, if you listen to the old wives' tale. Robins made their presence known as I walked on to the end of this path then took a left downhill towards the lake at the bottom. A Jay called as it flew across the clearing showing the bright blue wing feathers so loved by anglers who use them on *fly lures* as the blue glistens when under the water. A pair of Mistle Thrushes showing the tell-tale white marks under their wings (which always makes me laugh as it looks as if they sprayed some deodorant on themselves), flew across the opening making the distinctive call reminiscent

of the old style football rattles. The Green woodpecker I heard earlier revealed itself, hopping purposely on the ground searching amongst the Ant hills to the right of the path. They are always a pleasure to watch with their bright green colour, red head and long beak. They are a large bird at 13 inches from head to tail and very vocal and unmistakable when flying with their undulating flight.

The lake itself was devoid of birds apart from a single male Reed Bunting calling and a Moorhen making its way from left to right leaving behind the gentlest of ripples on the water, then disappearing into the thick Phragmites reeds.

After circling the lake I headed back uphill on a path slightly to the right of the lake and then into an open area with evidence of the coal clearly visible in exposed seams. Several Coltsfoot plants were growing along the low ridge that had been eroded by a small stream running through the coal. A Magpie, several Jackdaws and Carrion Crows were feeding on the open ground and a small group of Meadow Pipits flitted across. A Skylark briefly circled before landing on the ground but suddenly the small birds took flight and started alarm calling on the approach of a male Sparrowhawk. The hawk made its way towards the small birds but before he could make an attack the Crows and Jackdaws took flight to harass him. More Crows joined the melee before the hawk eventually gave up and flew off, pursued a little more by several Jackdaws.

I was soon back at the car park where Rabbit droppings were found along with a Buzzard wing feather. Next I was off to Parc Cwm Darren in the village of Deri.



*Green Woodpecker © ND*



**Parc Cwm Darren.** Steeped in a variety of habitats and nestled in a deep valley, Parc Cwm Darren makes for an enjoyable visit at any time of the year. The photo on the left is of the former Ogilvy Colliery now demolished and replaced by the country park; how things have changed! After scanning above the forestry from the car park watching four Common Buzzards, a Raven and a pair of Red Kites, I walked from the car park towards the lake but skirted off to follow a path up through the forestry plantation for several hundred metres. In the nearby Alders and Birches I watched a feeding group of Blue, Coal, Great and Long Tailed Tits with several Wrens, Dunnocks, a Treecreeper and a Nuthatch mixed in, all enjoying

safety in numbers whilst the foliage on the trees is minimal.

As I walked up through the lovely coniferous plantation I was entertained by large groups of Chaffinches flitting back and forth across the path. Sadly there were no Bramblings mixed in, but further along the path I heard a *chip chip* call and as I looked up I could see five Common Crossbills flying over the tree tops. What a lovely surprise and no doubt they had been feeding on the cones of the Larch trees, one of their favourite food sources. They are the only bird in the British Isles capable of getting at the seeds intact hidden inside the cones. To do this they use their amazing and unique beaks as a type of tweezers to prise open the cone sections. The upper mandible crosses over the lower one to give them the characteristic bill shape that explains their name. The male is a lovely brick red colour in breeding plumage with the female a delicate green.



*Sulphur Tufts, Common Earthball and Conifer Tuft fungi © ND*

The Larches, Norway Spruce and Western Hemlocks are coated with a mass of different lichens and mosses including Dicranium Scoparium, Cladonia Fimbriata and Usnea lichen which hang like beards from the branches. Goldfinches and Greenfinches were mixed in with the Chaffinches and several delicate calls from Bullfinches could be heard mixed in. Jays called noisily and a Mistle Thrush flew across a clearing. Several bright yellow clumps of Sulphur Tuft fungi could be seen on one of the tree stumps and close to the path grew a single Common Earthball fungi. A small clump of Conifer Tuft fungi was growing from the side of one of the Spruce trees and was a good species to find.

Heading back down I took the circular walk around the lake which had the usual waterfowl present such as Moorhens and Coots and the ever present Mallards. A Grey Heron stood motionless on the bank glaring intently into the water below, and making slow deliberate strides into the shallows. Its stealth and patience paid off as with a quick strike of the head propelled by strong neck muscles it caught a small fish in its long sharp yellow bill. A gentle movement of the head, and the fish was swallowed whole and the process repeated. A Pied Wagtail fed further along the bank, with a Dunnock and several Blackbirds close by. Herring Gulls flew back and forth over the lake with several of the smaller Black Headed Gulls mixed in.

The Alders to the left of the lake held small groups of Siskins, and several groups of yellow Stags Horn Fungus grew at ground level on fallen branches. A quick sandwich back at the car listening to a Nuthatch calling in the branches above me, and then it was off again on my travels, this time to Bryn Bach Park.

**Bryn Bach Park.** A pleasant drive up to the outskirts of Rhymney and I arrived at Bryn Bach Park, the site of former open cast coal project. The weather had changed by now, becoming more overcast. I was hoping that the rain would hold off for the rest of the day, which thankfully it did. A circular walk around the lake began with watching a rather light Common Buzzard being harassed by a Carrion Crow as it sat in a tree top. The Crow was persistent in its dive bombing tactics and eventually a fed up Buzzard decided to fly off, with the Crow in hot pursuit. It's hard to blend in with the trees when you're the size of a Buzzard. A dog walker stopped to tell me of a large group of finches he had been watching further along the path. From his description they sounded like Siskins.



*Common Buzzard being harassed by a Carrion Crow and a Waxcap fungi © ND*

It was nice to see good numbers of Great Crested Grebes and I counted over fourteen on the lake. Mallards, Coots, Moorhens and several Common Pochards were present and several Cormorants were drying their wings whilst perched on the large limestone boulders edging the island. Herring and Lesser Black-backed Gulls were amongst them.

As I approached the far left side of the path the Alders did indeed contain finches – Siskins in good numbers, one group having well over fifty birds, but a closer look through them with binoculars showed smaller numbers of Lesser Redpolls mixed in. The delicate red on the forehead of the Redpoll stands out as they flit amongst the branches. A Grey Wagtail was feeding in the small outflow stream and a walk through the Soft Rushes growing in the damp field just beyond the stile flushed two Common Snipe and one Jack Snipe. Although the Jack

Snipe is smaller than the Common Snipe, they can be best told apart by their flight action when flushed – the Common flies in a zig-zag pattern then lands a few hundred yards away whereas the Jack Snipe flies in a relatively straight line for some time before descending into cover. Either way they fly up at the last moment always making one jump. A bright Waxcap fungus was a nice find in the short grass.



*Drake Tufted Duck, Common Snail and a drake Teal © ND*

Along the return path more small groups of Siskins were feeding in the Alders. A Green Woodpecker called and a Raven came into view and landed in a tree, giving out its loud *cronking* call several times before taking off across the valley. A large female Sparrowhawk flew across the lake causing a panic amongst the waterfowl, most of which took flight whilst others dived. After several minutes they returned to the water and settled down again.

By the wooden walkway I watched a nice group of Tufted Ducks with several Teal (our smallest duck in the British Isles) and close by, at the base of the trees, a nice group of Blushing Bracket fungi was growing. A Treecreeper was spiralling its way up a small tree before flying down to the base of the next tree and repeating the feeding action. As I approached the car park, I could hear a Golden Plover overhead and soon spotted it flying in the direction of Butetown Pond. A lovely end to a pleasant winter's walk around Bryn Bach Park.

**Bargoed Woodlands.** To access this site I parked in a small lay-by near the new fire station and walked down along the fence line towards the main road, then onto the track that leads down into the wooded valley below. By now it was late afternoon and I had done well to cover the four parks for the article in the same day. The temperature had dropped and the light was slowly fading as the cloud cover thickened. One could easily spend a greater amount of time in each of these parks, especially during the spring and summer. The aerial photograph that appears next shows the area of woodland I visited. My car was parked near the roundabout on the right hand side of the photo. This photo demonstrates how easy it is to discover the delights of nature so near to houses and factories. David Mills has told me that as a child he spent many happy hours exploring the small dingle (which contained a pond in a disused quarry) that fortunately still exists and runs parallel with the road between the two roundabouts in the centre of the photo, it is in the line of trees just above the factory buildings.



Note by David Mills. The photo below shows the demolished Gwaelod y Waun Farm. Only traces of the buildings now exist. The site of the house can be seen on the aerial photo above, situated between the arched bridge and the two factory buildings, which are below the central roundabout. Gwaelod y Waun was one of the largest farms in the area, with land extending as far as Bedwellty Church. It was on the side of Angel Lane.



***Witches Butter Fungi growing along a branch, slimy but a lovely specimen © ND***



The wooded area was alive with birds which are always nice to see and included Treecreeper, Nuthatch, Woodpigeons, Jays, Song Thrush, Blackbird and Dunnocks. Feeding groups included Chaffinches and Goldfinches interspersed with Coal, Blue and Great Tits and two Goldcrests (our smallest British bird). A Marsh Tit at the edge of the woods was a lovely and unexpected surprise and it has been a while since I last saw one.

Common Buzzards were *mewing* overhead and a Great Spotted woodpecker was calling from deep within the woods. The stream was devoid of bird life apart from a lone Grey Wagtail searching for insects along the bank, continually bobbing its tail which I have always believed to be to attract insects to the movement, coupled with their bright belly colours. I also think this is why Dippers and Common Sandpipers perform this bobbing action as it attracts the insects and invertebrates.

Several Turkey Tail fungi could be seen along with an Oak tree covered with the Artists Fungus – a large bracket fungi, white below and brown above which eats into the tree and eventually causes its demise. In the damper parts of the woodland grew carpets of Polystrichum Commune moss which always reminds me of an aerial view of a forest when looked at close up.



***A Nuthatch feeding and Polystrichum Commune moss © ND***

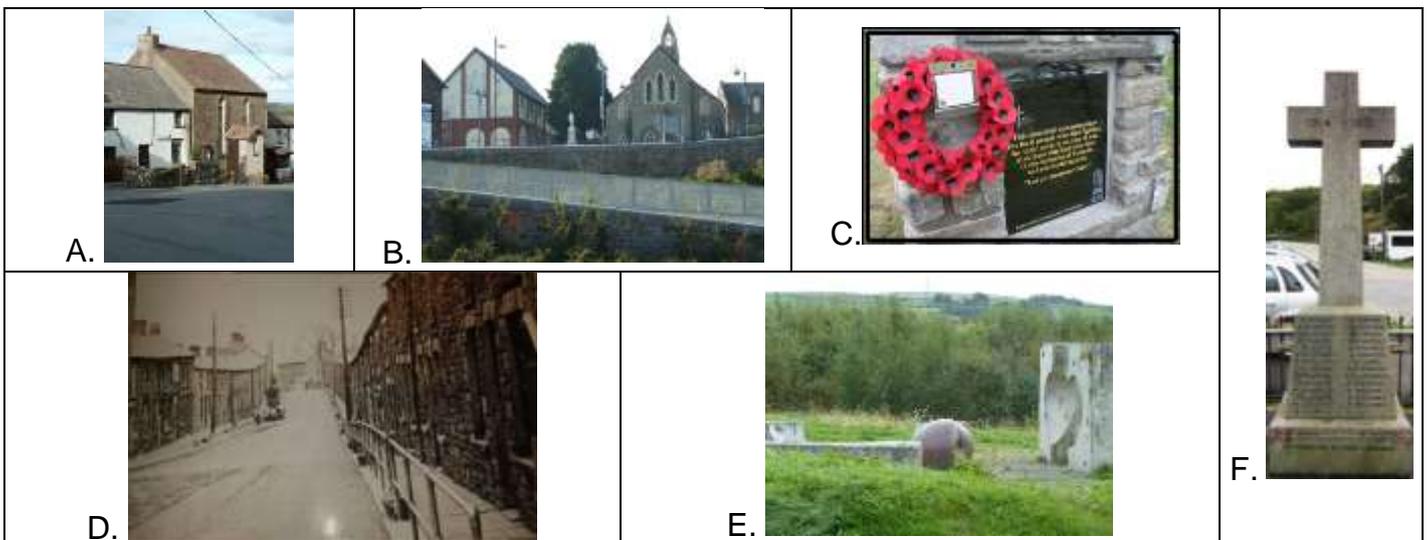
Finally at the end of a walk around four of our local, interesting and beautiful parks I ended my adventure. The light had faded some more, it was getting noticeably colder and the rain had just started almost right on cue. As I made my way back up towards the main road a Woodcock took flight from the cover and quickly flew out across the opening and away out of sight. What

a lovely end to a full day taking in what the winter has to offer, so different from the spring and summer but equally having its own delights appropriate to the season.

*Written by Neville Davies for Gelligaer Historical Society, December 2015.*

Neville is a wildlife expert specialising in guided nature walks, power point presentations, bird identification courses, school and group visits and much more. He has a large following of natural history enthusiasts and is the author of four books to date with four more currently being written. For more information or to book a walk or talk please visit [www.ecologycymru.co.uk](http://www.ecologycymru.co.uk)

Answers to *WHERE IN GELLIGAER?* Issue 34 Summer 2015



A Horeb Baptist Chapel, Gelligaer

B Bargoed war memorial (between St Gwladys Church and Church Hall)

C Fochriw Memorial Stone (unveiled September 25 2014)

D High Street, Troedrhifwuch

E Breaking the Mould (Andrew McKeown) in Parc Penallta

F Bedlinog war memorial

**“Where In Gelligaer?”**

A



B



C



D



D



E



*See previous page for answers to last issue's quiz.*