



# GELLIGAER TIMES

NEWSLETTER OF

THE GELLIGAER HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Issue number 55 May 2021

## GHS MEMBERSHIP

Although GHS has not met at Llancaiach Fawr since February 2020, the Society's officers and committee are very grateful to those members who have paid 2021-22 membership (by BACs or cheque). During the past twelve months, GHS has had some online book sales but has not been able to sell its publications in meetings and through local outlets.

Following a pleasing response to the first GHS Zoom talk (which was limited to 40 minutes) in March 2021, GHS Committee decided to subscribe to Zoom to allow for full-length talks followed by questions and comments, until Llancaiach Fawr opens for meetings and members feel confident to attend.

Currently, the editorial team is busy with the Society's Diamond jubilee publication about nineteenth century Gelligaer parish. Hopefully, circumstances will be such that the planned programme of talks for Diamond Jubilee year (September 2021 to June 2022) will proceed, and that the publication can be launched at the first of those meetings.

Thus, the generous donations received from some members and friends of the Society are especially appreciated, as they will help ensure meetings continue and the Diamond Jubilee volume is published. If you wish to make a payment to GHS, you can:

- Post a cheque to the Treasurer (who will send the address to those who ask)
- BACs payment (Treasurer will supply GHS bank details to those who ask)
- Set up a direct debit/standing order (Treasurer will supply details to those who ask)
- Contact [chairman@gelligaerhistoricalsociety.co.uk](mailto:chairman@gelligaerhistoricalsociety.co.uk) or [www.gelligaerhistoricalsociety.co.uk](http://www.gelligaerhistoricalsociety.co.uk)

## *Zoom Zoom Zoom Zoom*

The next Zoom meeting will be on Wednesday 26th May starting at 7 p.m. when Brian Davies will give a talk on: **The Statues in Cardiff City Hall-Welsh Heroes ?**

## GHS AGM 2021

Members will recall that GHS did not hold a face-to-face AGM in June 2020. The uncertainty continues, and GHS has made arrangements for a speaker who will deliver a Zoom talk on Wednesday 30 June 2021. **Immediately before the talk starts, GHS AGM will take place on Zoom.** All GHS members should receive the minutes of the last AGM, and the agenda for the 2021 AGM, together with the necessary reports and voting papers before 16 June. Any GHS member who has not received these by 16 June 2021, please contact [chairman@gelligaerhistoricalsociety.co.uk](mailto:chairman@gelligaerhistoricalsociety.co.uk) or [www.gelligaerhistoricalsociety.co.uk](http://www.gelligaerhistoricalsociety.co.uk)

## **Zoom meeting April 2021**

Twenty-six viewers took part in the Society's second Zoom meeting when Peter Strong gave his talk on a somewhat unusual event- The Newport Naval "Mutiny" of 1921. He explained how two trains and two warships arrived in Newport, Naval Ratings in full marching order proceeded through the town. Warships had also arrived in Cardiff, plus a submarine. The reason for a military presence was that Prime Minister David Lloyd George had declared a state of emergency because strikes were causing considerable concern. Troops had been sent to Abertillery where a calm atmosphere prevailed, the troops integrating into the community and taking part in soccer matches. It was not the same at Newport where the troops were far from happy because of inadequate accommodation. After initially being put up at churches and a school the troops were marched to a factory at Alexandra Docks, but the accommodation was just as bad and there was no food available. The men were called to parade but 500 to 600 refused the order. The Commanding Officer, Edward Coverly Kennedy, ordered the regular troops to fall in and arrest the men that were "causing problems". His second in command felt the men had genuine grievances because the living conditions were bad and offered to speak to a deputation which helped calm the situation. Kennedy however faced a court martial because he was alleged not to have taken proper measures to prevent a mutiny. Despite Kennedy's strong defence he was found guilty and reprimanded. Later that year, after a re-organisation, he left the navy. Kennedy was the father of the well-known broadcaster and author Ludovic Kennedy, later Sir Ludovic, who also served in the Royal Navy.

At the outbreak of WWII Kennedy was placed in charge of an armed merchant cruiser which became engaged by two German battleships, Kennedy was given the chance to surrender. His response was to open fire. Completely outgunned by the German ships the battle only lasted just over fifteen minutes before Kennedy's ship was sunk; along with most of the crew Kennedy lost his life. He was posthumously mentioned in despatches.

Because G.H.S. now has the facility to enjoy a longer period on the Zoom talks several participants were able to ask questions of Peter, additionally some viewers were able to mention their own recollections of life in the armed forces; one of whom (no name mentioned) confessed to being a mutineer !!, but in a mild sort of way.

## **Of Interest**

Dr. Ben Curtis (some readers may recall that he has spoken to GHS and/or have seen him on TV, especially on news reports about coal society in Wales) has a chapter entitled Incorrigible Rebels: The significance of the Communist Party in the South Wales Coalfield 1917-36 in *The Global Impacts Of Russia's Great War And Revolution, Book 2: The Wider Arc Of Revolution, Part 2*, edited by Choi Chatterjee et al., from Slavica Publishers (2019).

MERTHYR HISTORIAN  
VOLUME 31



Merthyr Tydfil Historical Society

Merthyr Tydfil Historical Society has recently published *Merthyr Historian*, Volume 31, the list of contents, price and how to purchase a copy are available on [Merthyr Tydfil Historical Society: Merthyr Historian Volume 31 \(merthyr-tydfil-historical-society.blogspot.com\)](http://Merthyr Tydfil Historical Society: Merthyr Historian Volume 31 (merthyr-tydfil-historical-society.blogspot.com))

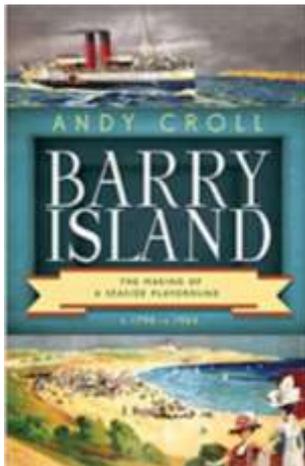
MTHS's new journal has much to fascinate those wishing to learn about the history of the town and the communities across Merthyr Tydfil County Borough, but it is not without interest to readers in Gelligaer parish. Its chapters embrace a wide range of local topics, including the iron and coal industries, transport history and social life, as well as studies of national and international significance.

The journal's cover photograph is taken from Roger Evans's article on Penydarren-born Frank T. Davies (1904-81) who, after studying in U.C.W. Aberystwyth, made his home in Canada and pursued a pioneering career as a geophysicist and polar explorer.

No doubt, in the 1920s, many Gelligaer people were familiar with the music described in the chapter headed *The drums go bang, the cymbals clang, three bands, Troedyrhiw 1921*. Starting with a series of letters published in *Merthyr Express*, Dr. T.F. Holley (GHS life member) and his son, John, researched the local choirs and their conductors, with Carolyn Jacob supplementing their work with some family details on conductors, Joseph Williams, and Robert Henry Weale.

Alan Owen's contribution on his grandfather, Emlyn Davies (1870-1938), a Dowlais draper, is another chapter relevant to Gelligaer parish. It includes much on the family (for example, his daughter married Frank Button, manager of Barclays Bank, Ystrad Mynach). Emlyn Davies left his birthplace in rural Carmarthenshire and made good in industrial south-east Wales. There is a full discussion of how his business developed, including when and how he started his rounds in various Gelligaer communities in the upper Taff Bargoed, Darran and Rhymney valleys. Some readers may recall these rounds which continued under his daughter, Miriam Bronwydd Owen, to the early 1960s.

There is much more in Volume 31, but I will leave it for you to read.



**BARRY ISLAND: THE MAKING OF A SEASIDE PLAYGROUND c1790-c1965**, by Andy Croll, published Cardiff University Press, 2020.

After nearly a decade of research, Dr. Andy Croll, principal lecturer in history at University of South Wales, had produced this well-illustrated book tracing the changing history of Barry Island from the time of the French Revolution onwards to the middle decades of the twentieth century. It may appeal to *Gelligaer Times* readers, with fond (or otherwise) memories of day trips, by train or by bus, to Barry Island.

GWENT ARCHIVES has recently posted on Facebook that *With our Research Room currently closed, one of our [#ArchiveGoals](#) has been to make more of our catalogues available online! You can find our catalogues and a video guide on our website here: [www.gwentarchives.gov.uk/our-collection/archives.aspx](http://www.gwentarchives.gov.uk/our-collection/archives.aspx)*

### **Ruppera Castle Preservation Trust**

RCPT is starting a series of zoom talks which will take place on a Thursday evening starting on **May 27<sup>th</sup> at 7.30** and ending on **July 15<sup>th</sup>**.

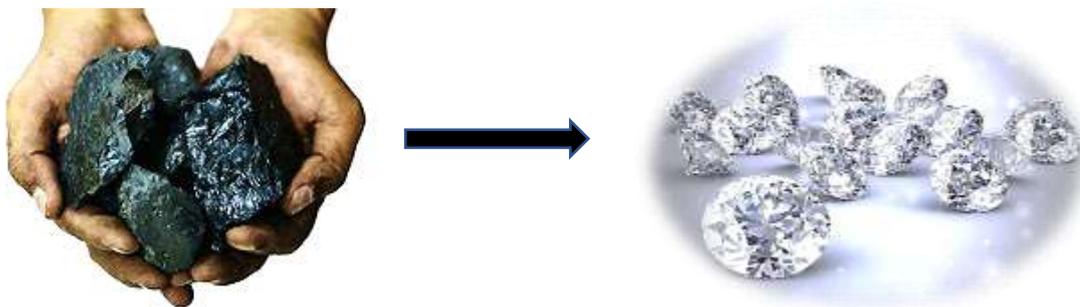
In the first series we have arranged five talks which we hope will help fill out the historical background which the inhabitants of Ruppera would have experienced. If you wish to attend a talk, please email [Patjonesjenkins@googlemail.com](mailto:Patjonesjenkins@googlemail.com) and you will be sent the Zoom link in time for the first talk on May 27<sup>th</sup>. This means that your email address will not be shared by anyone else outside your Trust. You will be reminded of each talk immediately beforehand as well.

### **There is no charge to join in these meetings.**

<b>Welsh Heroes - The Statues in Cardiff City Hall</b>	Brian Davies	27 <sup>th</sup> May 2021
<b>Story of a tribal leader: Caratacus who became a hero</b>	Professor Emeritus Ray Howel	3 <sup>rd</sup> June 2021
<b>O Dduwiau I Ddelweddau - From Gods to Heroes</b>	Dr. Elin Jones	17 <sup>th</sup> June 2021
<b>The Life and Times of Owain Glyndwr</b>	Geraint Thomas	1 <sup>st</sup> July 2021
<b>The First Ruppera Castle</b>	Janet Wilding	15 <sup>th</sup> July 2021

## COAL~~THE BLACK DIAMOND

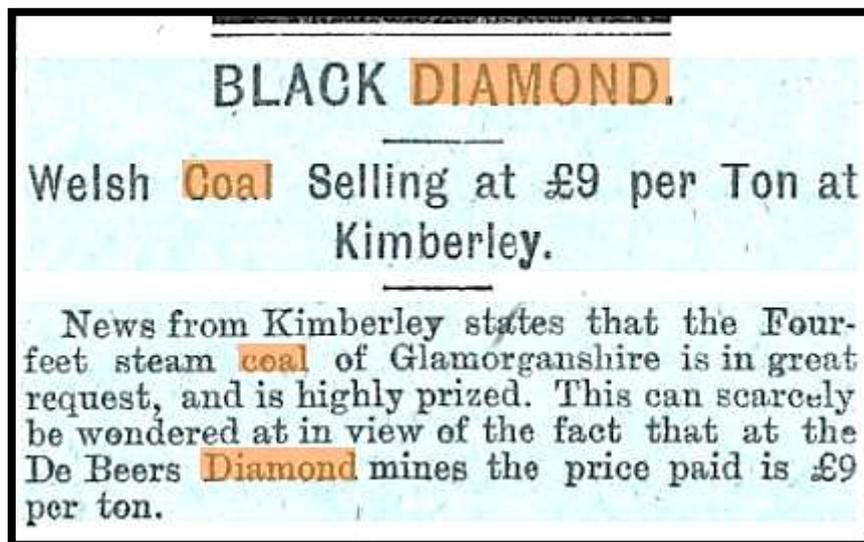
CAN COAL BE CONVERTED TO DIAMONDS?



Gelligaer Historical Society celebrates its Diamond Jubilee Anniversary in 2021 with the publication of a book detailing the history of the parish of Gelligaer in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. With coal figuring heavily in the history I set about looking for comments as to why coal is sometimes known as the ***Black Diamond***. The explanation is probably because coal became a valuable commodity and produced a boom type economy. However, there are some interesting scientific details which link coal and diamonds.

Both coal and diamonds are composed of carbon, which exists in three different forms on earth. The first is amorphous and has no crystal structure, the second is called graphite and is composed of hexagonal crystals. Diamonds are the third form of carbon and have cubic crystals. Coal is the amorphous form of carbon but is not made of pure carbon. It is composed of complex organic molecules of decomposed plants and animals, which have been decompressed for millions of years in the earth's crust. The transformation of coal into diamonds is **almost impossible**, even if there are carbon atoms in coal the impurities are so great that it takes millions of years to transform into the purest form-graphite. And the transformation from graphite to coal takes a few more million years.

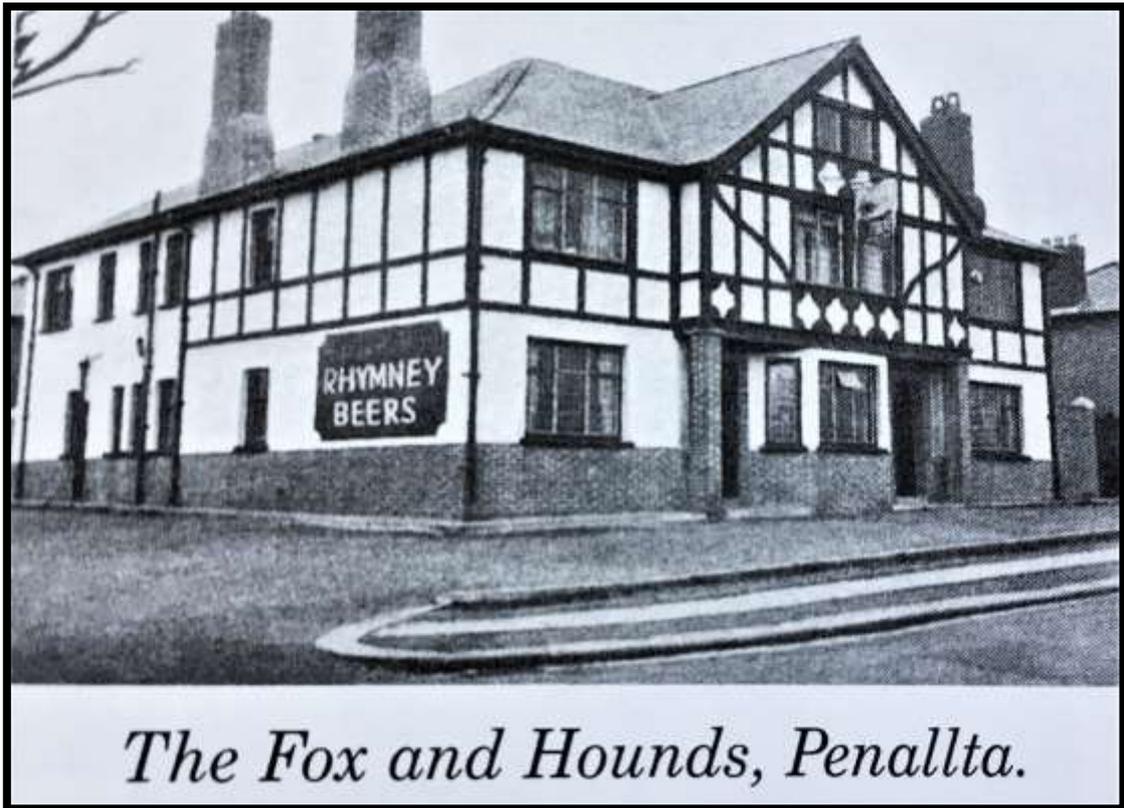
The note below appeared in *The Evening Express* November 1893. The De Beers Diamond mines are based in South Africa. One of the largest and most famous diamonds in the world was discovered there. It once formed part of the Russian Crown Jewels where it was a large flat stone before being recut into its present state in 1921.



*David Mills*

### **Pubs with family names**

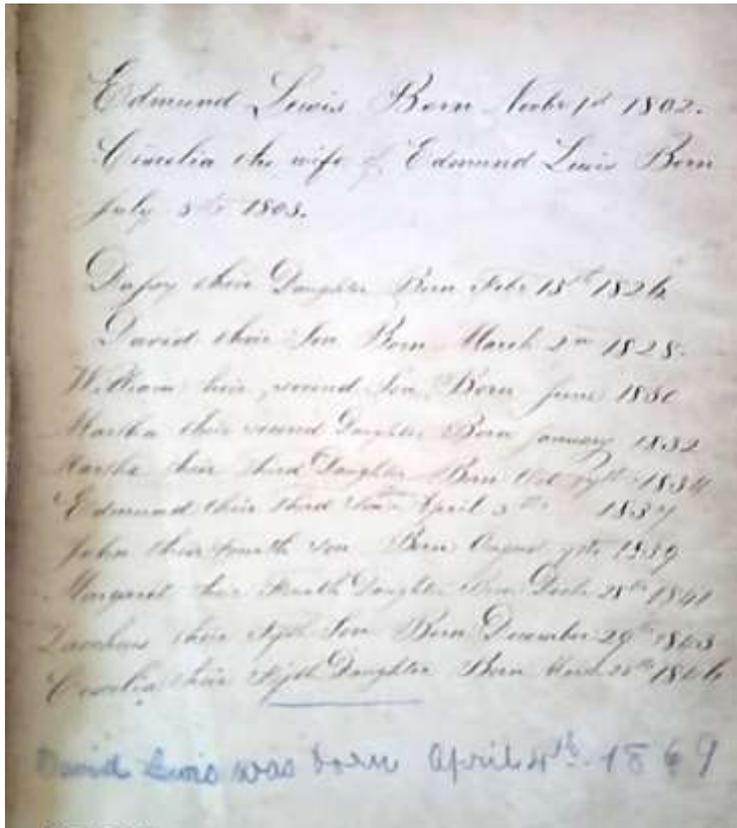
March Newsletter No. 53 contained a suggested project on this topic. A few responses have been received including information from GHS member Clive Williams, who has extensive experience and knowledge of the brewing industry. Clive's article "Bargoed Memories" in *Gelligaer* Vol. 24 (2017) gives a good starting point to anyone wishing to discover more about Bargoed pubs. He forwarded the photograph below which is of a pub that may have not been known by many readers, and indeed there are not many old photographs available. If any reader has one, or more details then please contact the society. The pub is situated in Troisant Crescent, Penybryn near Gelligaer.



**Calling the descendants of Edmund Lewis of Gelligaer born 1<sup>st</sup> Nov 1802**, a coal miner living in Maindy, Gelligaer **and his wife Ciscelia born 5<sup>th</sup> July 1803** Bedwellty. Edmund and Ciscelia lived in Gelligaer village and had several surviving children including Zaccheus b1843 also a coal miner in Gelligaer. **I have your family bible.**

It is an Eyre & Spottiswoode bible in Welsh published London 1841, slightly larger than A4. On the front cover is impressed 'Y Bibl Cymdeithas Frytanaidd a Thramor – Blwyddyn Jubili 1853'. This translates as the British and Foreign Bible Society – Jubilee Year 1853 which is a charity providing free bibles around the world. The binding is intact, and the overall condition is fair given its age.

The names of the Lewis family are written in copperplate script on the flyleaf as shown in the photograph. The family are easy to find on the census returns for Gelligaer. David Lewis b. 1869 has added his name later in pencil.



It has always been a puzzle as to how this bible has ended up in my possession. It proved to be a total red herring when I started researching my family tree a decade ago. Naturally, I thought the family must be among my ancestors – otherwise how did we have this bible in the house? I first saw it in the 1980's on the death of a great aunt whose maiden name was Lewis. I copied out the names written in the beginning of the Bible and vowed one day to find out more about my ancestors – which I did - but discovered that this family were not among them. They are not related to my great aunt or her husband.

I can only assume the bible had been given away, perhaps by the descendants of the lastnamed David Lewis. It was then acquired by my great aunt Ceridwen. She may have been given it because she was a fluent Welsh speaker and deaconess in Bont chapel in Pengam Mon. or because she too had been born a Lewis.

Edmund and Ciscelia are not my great, great, great grandparents but, given the popularity of family history research, someone reading this may recognise the family from this description. Anyone interested in reclaiming the Bible can contact me directly [jenpd63@gmail.com](mailto:jenpd63@gmail.com)

*Jen Pritchard*

### **The Industrial Past**

The research taking place by members of the society has inevitably meant that the coal industry is perhaps getting more attention than it has done in the past, although there are a small number of industrial articles in past editions of our journal.

The photograph was sent in by Judith Jones with her comment “they don't build them like they used to”. It was taken near Llwyn Iago farm, Fochriw.



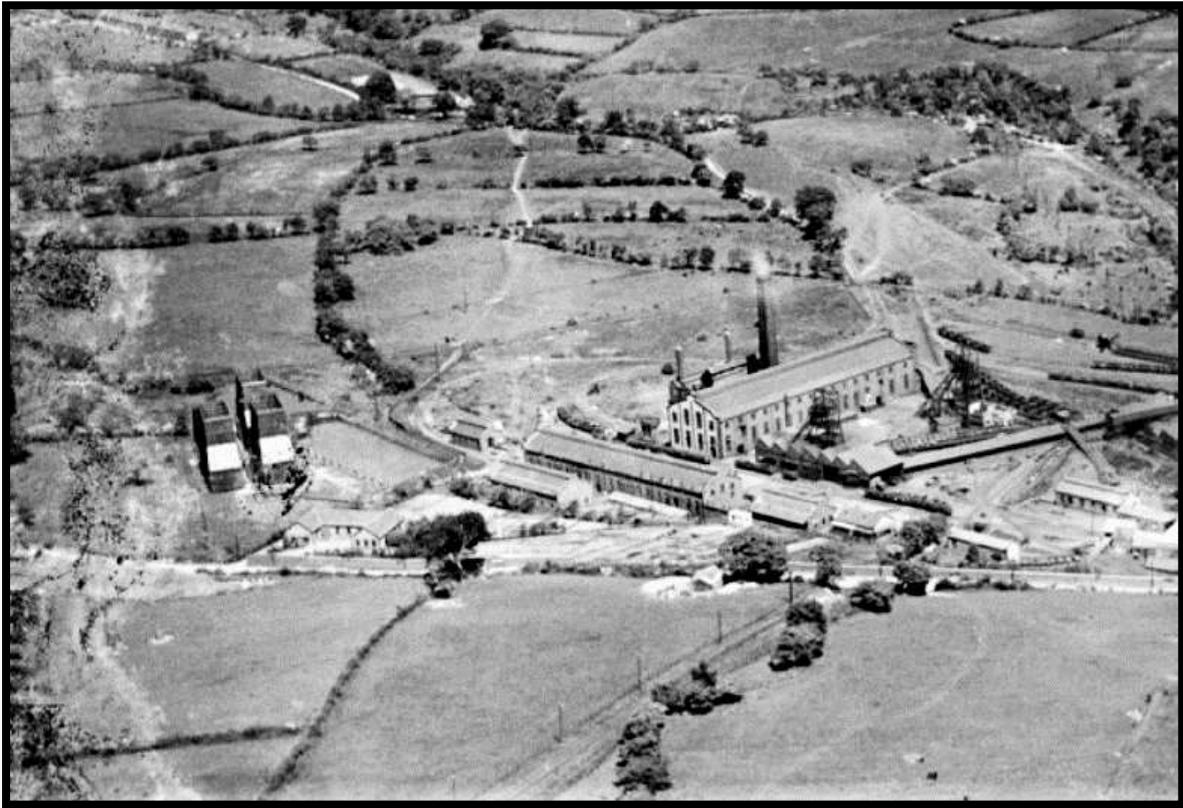
**Not the industrial past-or maybe it is**

The photograph below is of an inscribed stone at a farm somewhere in the parish; does anyone know what it was used for?



## **Industrial, but also rural**

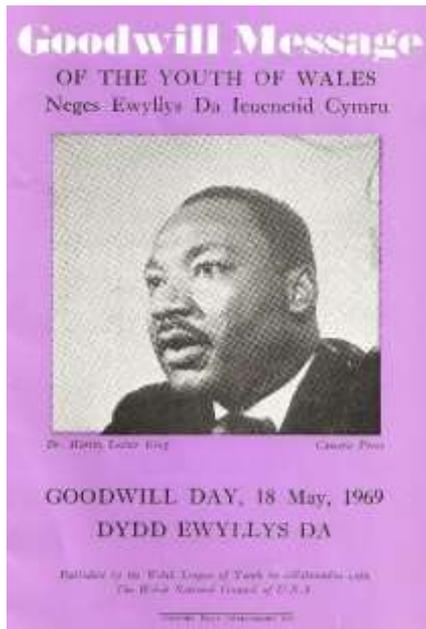
This early aerial photograph shows Penallta Pit surrounded by open countryside.



### **REVD GWILYM DAVIES AND THE GOODWILL MESSAGE**

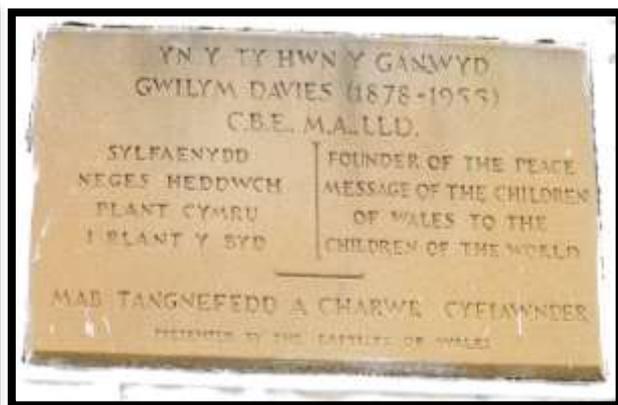
Many *Gelligaer Times* readers will remember the annual (18 May) Goodwill Message sent across the world, in as many languages as possible, from the youth of Wales. I recall the morning assembly at Lewis School in the school chapel devoted to readings of the message in all languages - the boys from Italian families read it in Italian, the linguists came with French, German, English, Polish, Esperanto and so on. It was organised by the Urdd for the publication of the message and later for broadcast by BBC Wales.

These illustrations show the front of the 1969 booklet containing the Goodwill Message in a variety of languages and the 1969 message Welsh.



The Goodwill Message was inspired by Revd Gwilym Davies, who, like me, was born in Bedlinog. He was born in Commercial Street in 1879 and his father was the Baptist minister in the nearby chapel, Salem. These photographs show his childhood home with the plaque recording his work.

Gwilym spent some time as a pupil teacher in Bedlinog before the family moved to Llangadog where his father had a new ministry. Later, Gwilym went to university and eventually became a Baptist minister in Pembrokeshire and Carmarthen, and he is commemorated with a blue plaque (image [Dr Gwilym Davies | Brian Cooper | Flickr](#)) in the latter.



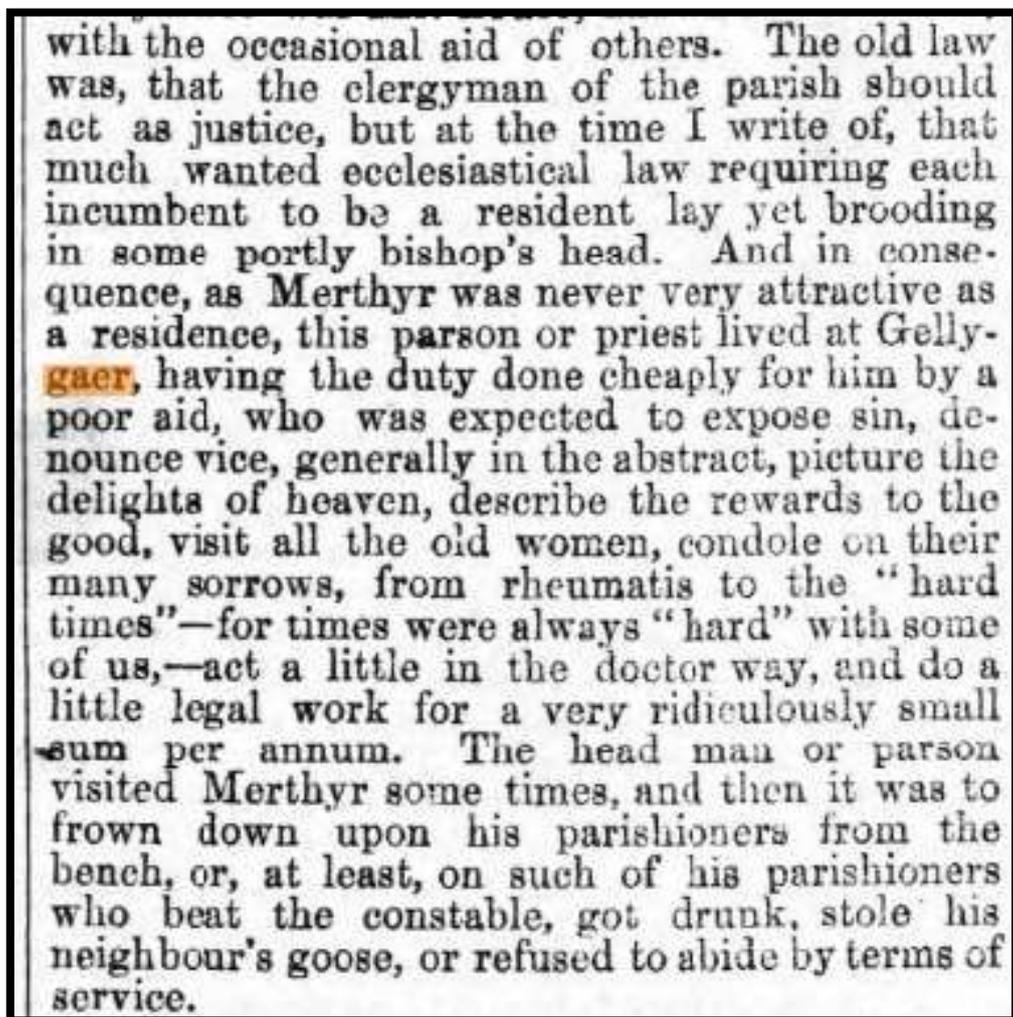
Like many others, he was affected by the death and destruction of the First World War and became a supporter of the League of Nations, and later, with Lord Davies of Llandinam, a leading Welsh advocate for the United Nations. In 1922 he established the Goodwill Peace message from the children of Wales to the youth of all nations. Wales was the first country in the world where the children broadcast such a message, initially in morse code.

Over the years, the message changed to reflect changing times. The 2020 message emphasised spending money needlessly, needless waste and travel; caring for those less fortunate; and doing everything possible to preserve the planet. Revd Gwilym Davies was the first person to broadcast in Welsh. His ashes are scattered at Lavernock Point where the first radio transmissions were made by Marconi.

*Carwyn Hughes*

### **The joys of being a Clergyman**

The following extract from *The Merthyr Telegraph* of 25<sup>th</sup> August 1860 sets out both the spiritual and temporal job descriptions for clergymen and the benefits of being able to delegate enjoyed by some of the “higher up” clergy. It also hints at the state of morals at the time. There is also a hint, depending on which way you read the article, that the clergy may have exposed sin, or denounced vice based on their own personal experiences !. As in all walks of life there may have been some who “fell from grace”



with the occasional aid of others. The old law was, that the clergyman of the parish should act as justice, but at the time I write of, that much wanted ecclesiastical law requiring each incumbent to be a resident lay yet brooding in some portly bishop's head. And in consequence, as Merthyr was never very attractive as a residence, this parson or priest lived at Gellygaer, having the duty done cheaply for him by a poor aid, who was expected to expose sin, denounce vice, generally in the abstract, picture the delights of heaven, describe the rewards to the good, visit all the old women, condole on their many sorrows, from rheumatis to the “hard times”—for times were always “hard” with some of us,—act a little in the doctor way, and do a little legal work for a very ridiculously small sum per annum. The head man or parson visited Merthyr some times, and then it was to frown down upon his parishioners from the bench, or, at least, on such of his parishioners who beat the constable, got drunk, stole his neighbour's goose, or refused to abide by terms of service.