



GELLIGAER TIMES

NEWSLETTER OF GELLIGAER HISTORICAL SOCIETY

FEBRUARY 2022 number 61

DIAMOND JUBILEE YEAR

MESSAGE FROM EDITOR

This newsletter includes:

- GHS news
- Gelligaer Community Council presentation lunch
- Peoples Collection Wales
- Who would have believed it?
- Recent and forthcoming publications
- Leftovers
- History of local history in and near Gelligaer parish
- News from other Historical/ Heritage groups

I hope you find something of interest in this newsletter. I will be pleased to receive your feedback as well as ideas for items to include in future issues. Please send your comments and contributions to www.gelligaerhistoricalsociety.co.uk or chairman@gelligaerhistoricalsociety.co.uk

GHS NEWS

GHS January meeting was a daytime meeting with two talks delivered, either side of a lunch break, by GHS Chair and GHS President to those attending at Llancaiah and on Zoom.

The first talk, by Annie Owen, entitled *Ruddle Davies and Ystrad Mynach*, was delivered via Zoom, while, after lunch, Dr. Elin Jones spoke on *Gelligaer or Gelligâr or Gelligær? Some features of the local dialect.*

GHS February meeting will be in Llancaiah Fawr and on Zoom, 7 p.m. Wednesday 23 February when Terry McCarthy M.A., past chairman of GHS, will deliver a Zoom talk *Coal for the Grand Fleet – The Jellicoe Specials*

GHS March meeting, again a 7 p.m. start in Llancaiah Fawr and on Zoom on Wednesday 30 March, for Dr. Stuart Broomfield's talk *The development of Pontlottyn in the nineteenth century as the main industrial centre in the parish of Gelligaer.*

**IF YOU WISH TO JOIN BY ZOOM,
AND YOU HAVE NOT RECEIVED
THE ZOOM LINK 24 HOURS
BEFORE THE START OF THE
MEETING, PLEASE CONTACT GHS
THEN.**

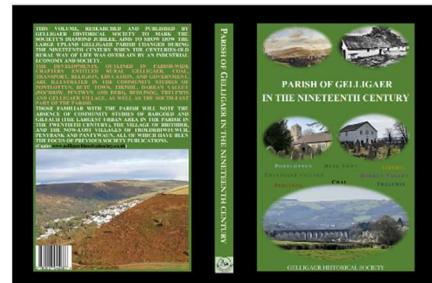
GHS CONFERENCE – you will recall that the 2020 conference was postponed and could not be rearranged during 2021. Plans to arrange it for March/April 2022 have been thwarted but circumstances may be such that it can be held in September/October 2022. This newsletter and GHS website will keep you informed.

GHS's Diamond Jubilee publication continues to attract attention both locally and further afield. To those of you who have read the book, the editing team hope that you enjoyed it and will be pleased to hear your feedback on the volume. There are some more *LEFTOVERS* from the book later in this newsletter.

If you know of anyone who might be interested or you are associated with other local newsletters, please forward this photograph of the cover together with the following short review. The more publicity GHS's publications can get, the better.

PARISH OF GELLIGAER IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY, written and published by Gelligaer Historical Society, 2021, 316 pp. Hard back, Illustrated.

Following several years of research, Gelligaer Historical Society has produced this history of Gelligaer, Glamorgan's most north-easterly parish, in the nineteenth century to mark the Society's diamond jubilee. By the opening of the nineteenth century, the industrial revolution had started to make a mark on the most northern part of the parish, and during the decades that followed, economic and social changes rolled south throughout the parish. After a short



introductory chapter, the volume comprises chapters on the parish entitled *Rural Gelligaer, Coal, Transport, Religion, Education and Government*, and those are followed by community studies of Gelligaer village, Pontlottyn, Bute Town, Tirphil, Darran valley (Fochriw, Pentwyn and Deri), Cwmfelin (Bedlinog), Trelewis, and the parish's south-east (Penpedairheol, Pengam, Cefn Hengoed, Hengoed and Ystrad Mynach). For copies of the volume, please see www.gelligaerhistoricalsociety.co.uk. (Review by Annie Owen).

Why is GHS celebrating its Diamond Jubilee 2021-22? If you have ever wondered why GHS started in the winter of 1961-62, Annie Owen's essay *HISTORY OF LOCAL HISTORY IN AND NEAR GELLIGAER PARISH* later in this newsletter may help answer the question.

Update on GHS commemoration of Queen's Platinum Jubilee - following on to the request for memories of local life in the post-WWII decades, GHS has received several photographs of items from that era, for example, photographs of a Festival of Britain souvenir glass, and Coronation commemorative cup, as well as of a National Identity card. GHS has also been promised photographs of extant ration books and of a coronation souvenir programme, as well as a photograph of a prize winner's ribbon from the 1950 National Eisteddfod in Caerphilly. Please look through your photograph albums to see what you can contribute to shed further light on the local area from about 1945 to the mid-1960s.

Gelligaer Community Council's Presentation Lunch at Llancaiaich Fawr -- GHS committee members Ann Pinch and Susan Price, thank GHS for allowing them the privilege of spending a few pleasant hours on Saturday 12 February representing GHS at this event. They report that

The Officers gave a synopsis of all the organisations present and each organisation in turn was acknowledged for their commitment to the community. There was also a short PowerPoint presentation about the work of the Council within the Community. The Lunch closed with the Melody Makers, performing in public for the first time in two years, singing a few songs which were enjoyed by all present. GHS is grateful not only to Gelligaer Community Council for inviting GHS to attend this Lunch and for again supporting GHS activities in the form of a generous grant, but also to Ann and Susan for giving up their time to (as the photograph below shows) tuck into generous portions of curry, rice, and chips, followed by sticky toffee pudding.



Peoples Collection Wales

GHS now has an account on this website [A People's Story of Wales | Peoples Collection Wales](#) which is free and brings together Wales's heritage. The collection is full of photographs, documents, audio and video recordings, and stories that link to the history, culture, and people of Wales. It was established in 2010 and funded by Welsh Government. The three leading partners are National Museum Wales, National Library Wales and Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales.

At the time of writing there are only three items published on the GHS account, two newsletters and a photograph of Llwyngolau farmhouse, but there is room for a lot more ! If you have not already done so, then please visit [A People's Story of Wales | Peoples Collection Wales](#)

The Society sees this as an opportunity to create an archive, possibly the first one in the sixty years of its existence, which will be made available to both present and future generations. There are several ways of

creating the archive but whichever one is used the fact remains that putting material on the site is regarded as publishing. Peoples Collection Wales (PCW) is however keen to point out that it does not acquire the copyright. Nevertheless, copyright remains an important consideration and PCW has a team of moderators who scrutinise any material submitted before it is published.

Any member of the Society who would like to discuss this further or wishes to send material to be added to GHS archives should in the first instance contact David Mills by email gelligaerghs.photos@gmail.com

One point emphasized by PCW during a recent training meeting is that a full description of the item uploaded greatly assists anyone who searches the site.

The following photograph of a woman demonstrates the absolute minimum description. If anyone can recognise the lady then I am sure PCW would be grateful to hear from you. The description on PCW is *Washing Clothes in a wooden tub at Ystrad Mynach 1930s, Creator unknown uploaded by National Library of Wales*



By way of a complete contrast the photograph of a Trelewis street scene has this full description

Description

This picture illustrates an early age of motorised transport, although it is clear from the photograph that such vehicles were few, and that traffic congestion was no problem in the 1920s. Prior to this period it was only mules and horses which waited outside inns and hotels for their drivers... a common practice which led to the saying that, following refreshments, 'too often mules would restart their journey like gentlemen and the drivers like mules'.

The hotel in the picture, dating from 1886, takes its name from the original name of the district. Bontnewydd means 'new bridge'. Like Treharris, Trelewis developed in the late 19th century as a small community of mining families who depended on the winning of coal. The most important communication link was always to the source of employment - at the neighbouring Deep Navigation Colliery.

Improved transport links, in terms of the roads and bridges, were encouraged by the opening of the new collieries at Taff Merthyr in 1926 and Trelewis Drift in 1954.

Source: Merthyr Tydfil Public Libraries (1991) 'Valley Views, Books 2: transport.'

*The hotel in the picture actually dates from 1900 not 1886 – despite there being a plaque saying 1886.

WHO WOULD HAVE THOUGHT IT ?

Thanks to the eagle eyes, and acute ears, of Judith Jones a photographic record now exists of a passenger train from Banbury, Leamington Spa, Birmingham New Street, Stourbridge, Kidderminster, Cheltenham Spa and Newport to CWMBARGOED.

The photos were taken by Judith when she heard an unusually loud noise of a train passing near her home in Bedlinog. It is not uncommon for freight trains to travel along the line from Cwmbargoed when they transport coal from the open cast site near Dowlais Top. But this time things were different. Who knows, one day perhaps the Orient Express will pass through Bedlinog !. However, that seems unlikely because the freight line is expected to cease running in 2022.



RECENT AND FORTHCOMING PUBLICATIONS

The Ocean Coal Company, with the subtitle *and 'The Barry-David Davies's Extraordinary South Wales Enterprises*, by Leslie M. Shore, published by Lightmoor Press, price £30.

GHS members are invited to attend Lightmoor Press's launch of this book on Wednesday, 6 April 2022 at 7 p.m., in Stiwdio 1, Park and Dare Theatre, Treorchy (subject to Covid-19 restrictions). In the past Leslie has spoken at a GHS conference about Powell Duffryn. GHS was represented at the launch of his *Peerless Powell Duffryn of the South Wales Coalfield*, in Winding House, New Tredegar, on 15 August 2012. Since then, he has also published *The Tredegar Company-One of the South Wales Coalfield's 'Big Three'*.

LEFTOVERS

Gelligaer Times 60 started publishing some *leftovers*, things that were not included in GHS Diamond publication, but the editing team thought may interest you. So here are a few more.

A WELSH-SPEAKING COALWORKER BORN IN COUNTY CORK

The small pool of both family and given names often makes it difficult for those searching for Welsh ancestors to be certain they have identified the right person for their family tree. The same can be said about many of the Irish-born people who arrived, both before and after the Irish potato famine, to find work in the developing industrial communities in south-east Wales, including those who arrived in Gelligaer parish.

One such man was Michael McCarty (McCarthy in some sources). Given the frequency of names like his in nineteenth-century south-east Wales, it is difficult to say when he arrived in the area and where he had lived prior to his marriage in Bedwellty parish church on 29 June 1872. The entry in the marriage register shows that both he and his bride made their mark, an indication that, like many of their contemporaries, neither of them had received any formal education.

1872. Marriage solemnized at the Parish Church in the Parish of Bedwellty, in the County of Monmouthshire								
No.	When Married.	Name and Surname.	Age.	Condition.	Rank or Profession.	Residence at the time of Marriage.	Father's Name and Surname.	Rank or Profession of Father
7	June 29 th	Michael McCarty	26	Bachelor	Labourer	Bedwellty	Dead	
	1872	Miriam Lawrence	21	Spinster	—	Bedwellty	Dead	

Born in County Cork about 1847, Michael McCarty, a husband and father, headed a household in Bedwellty parish at the time of the 1881 census. His children's birthplaces, as given in successive census returns, suggest that the family moved west of the river Rhymney into Gelligaer parish (Bargoed) before 1885, and when the

1891 census was taken the family was in 10 Factory Road. Michael was able to speak both English and Welsh. As his wife, Miriam, spoke Welsh only, it is likely that Michael's Welsh extended beyond that he would have learned alongside Welsh-speaking workmates. Shown as a coal trimmer in both the 1881 and 91 census returns, Michael's work was probably based in Cardiff Docks where he may have worked with other Irish coal trimmers. The work of a coal trimmer was hard and exacting. They shovelled and raked coal from the dockside and into the ship's hold, loading it so it would not shift and unbalance the ship, and then maintained a level coal heap so the ship could float safely. It was a dusty occupation and coal trimmers had the highest incidence of coal-related pneumoconiosis in coal-related trades. They were employed by the coal-shippers who charged the shipowners a tariff for the trimming service. This photograph of coal trimmers was probably taken in the 1930s.



By the time of the 1901 census, the family had moved to Bristol Terrace, Bargoed, and, while Michael, then a colliery labourer, and Miriam were listed as speaking both Welsh and English, the children in the family home spoke English only, a linguistic pattern common across much of Wales by that time. The 1911 census return offers further insight into Michael and his family. During their long marriage, Michael and Miriam had twelve children, five of whom had died before the 1911 census was taken. The 1911 household in 26 Bristol Terrace, a five-roomed dwelling in north Bargoed, comprised Michael, his wife, and what were probably their three youngest children, two sons and one daughter born 1890-94, as well as one grandson. Michael, 64-years-old by 1911 was employed by the Urban District Council as a Council Labourer, Road Scavenger which, if he was in the employ of Gelligaer rather than neighbouring Bedwellty UDC, may have involved the difficult task of keeping the roads and streets in the rapidly developing Bargoed free of debris and litter.

GELLIGAER ANTIQUITIES -- PROPOSED MUSEUM AT HENGOED

Presumably, the minutes of Gelligaer and Rhigos Rural District Council would confirm whether or not the following, appearing in *South Wales Daily News* 1 April 1899 page 4, was an April Fool joke or a far-sighted cultural initiative

At the instance of the Gelligaer and Rhigos Rural District Council a circular letter has been issued by Mr F. T. James, the clerk, Merthyr, to the inhabitants of Gelligaer and district setting forth that they have become impressed with the number and importance of the antiquities of Gelligaer and are desirous of securing their permanent preservation in a place accessible to all. To preserve from destruction these links with the past and to render them accessible to the public at large, the District Council have decided to grant space for the reception and exhibition of any articles – of sufficient interest at the Council Offices, Hengoed, where the collection will be open to all, free of charge, and at convenient hours. The Council earnestly hope that they will be heartily supported in their undertaking by the parishioners and those living in or connected with the district. Gifts or loans of articles connected with the past history of Gelligaer, such as weapons or implements of stone, bronze, or iron, ornaments pottery, coins, manuscripts, &c., will be thankfully received, and the trust that the interest awakened in the matter will result in bringing into the collection many articles that would otherwise get lost or destroyed. All communications should be addressed to the Local Antiquities Committee, Council Offices, Hengoed, or to Mr Frank T. James, solicitor and clerk to the above Council.

NOT ALL MIGRANTS INTO GELLIGAER PARISH WERE COALMINERS

While many people who moved into nineteenth century Gelligaer came because of the rapidly growing coal industry, some were neither miners nor service providers. One such man was Dublin-born sea-faring Christopher Gowan, who headed the household in Beechfield, Hengoed, at the time of the 1891 census. Research to date has done little to explain why he was at Beechfield which was not marked on the parish tithe award when the land was described as arable and in the hands of the Perrott family. It is likely that Beechfield,

and nearby dwellings, were erected after the Hengoed-Maesycwmmer railway junction offered easy access to places such as Cardiff and Newport, as well as Swansea and the English Midlands.

According to the 1891 census, Christopher Gowan was born in Ireland about 1857. However, as his seaman's certificates show he was born in 1852, perhaps he was economical with the truth in order to start his sea-faring career while underage. He worked through the various examinations and, in October 1878, received his Master's Certificate. Sources show that he served on various steam ships including *Edgar*, *Inca*, *Borthwick*, *Queen of the East*, *Portugalete* and *Northermoor*. Early in 1873, unlike most of his crewmates on *Borthwick*, he was discharged at Cardiff. It is difficult to track his movements after that, but in September 1878 he married Mary Ellen Deering, about a year his junior, in Dublin. It is unclear where she was at the time of the 1881 census when he was Chief Officer, on board *Portugalete*, a schooner rig engaged in foreign trade, which although based in Cardiff was then docked at Penzance, Cornwall.

When the 1891 census was taken, Christopher Gowan, *master mariner*, headed the household of four at Beechfield that included his wife, Mary Ellen, 5-year-old niece, Eugenie Connor, and a domestic servant, 17-year-old Edith Ann Davies. The servant, born in Gelligaer parish, spoke both Welsh and English, but the other three, born in Ireland, spoke English only. It is unclear when they left Beechfield and where any of them were at the time of the 1901 census.

While what happened to Christopher Gowan and his wife after they left Beechfield has little to do with the history of Gelligaer parish, readers may be interested in the newspaper reports not only on the death (through consumption) of Mary Ellen Gowan at Plasturton Gardens, Cardiff on 25 November 1903, but also on a case heard in Cardiff County Court on 5 May 1904. The press reports (*Cardiff Times* 5 December 1903 page 6, 7 May 1904 page 7, *Weekly Mail* 7 May 1904 page 7, with the latter including a letter written by Christopher Cowan on 8 December 1903 on board *Northermoor*, then in Naples) can be accessed on [Welsh Newspapers Online - Home \(library.wales\)](http://WelshNewspapersOnline.library.wales).

Christopher Gowan's marriage to Virginia Demetrides, was registered in Fylde, Lancashire, in September quarter 1907. When, in October 1910, *Evening Express* carried notice of his death and funeral, his home was 65 Marlborough Road, Cardiff. His widow, born in Constantinople about 1880, became a naturalised British subject in 1906, and, at the time of the 1911 census was a 30-year-old widowed hospital nurse in St. Marylebone Road, London.

SCION OF BLAEN RHYMNEY FAMILY

This title is taken from a heading in an item, written by James Davies M.Sc. of Caerphilly, that appeared in *Merthyr Express* 23 June 1934 page 3 to commemorate the bicentenary of the birth of Benjamin Francis (1734-99), a hymn-writer whose parents had links with Gelligaer parish.

Born in Pen Gelli, Newcastle Emlyn, Cardiganshire, Benjamin Francis was orphaned by the age of six. Aged fifteen, he became a member of the Baptist church in Swansea, where, five years later, he was recognised as a gifted preacher. He studied in the Baptist Academy at Bristol before becoming pastor at Horseley, Gloucestershire, a position he held to his death some forty years later. Although he ministered in England, it has been said that *His love for his native land constrained him to make contributions towards its church song*. He composed some of Wales's most popular hymns which were published in two collections, in 1774 and 1786.

Benjamin Francis's parents were both associated with Blaen Rhymney. See Greg Buick's *PART OF GELLIGAER THE FARMS AND THEIR FAMILIES 1540-1840 VOLUME 2 BRITHDIR HAMLET* for further information about Blaen Rhymney, land in the extreme north-east of Gelligaer parish, lying north of the present day A465 Heads of the Valleys road.

For generations, Benjamin Francis's maternal family had leased and farmed some of the land, until his grandfather, Walter David Evans (Walter Dafydd Ifan), *was forced to leave on the expiry of his lease when the Dowlais Iron Company took possession of the whole property*. This was one of the earliest signs of the way the local economy and society changed within the following century.

According to James Davies:

During the tenancy of Walter Dafydd Ifan, who was probably a deacon at Hengoed, Blaen Rhymni Fach became the meeting-place of the old Baptist Church at Hengoed. Although the Toleration Act had long been passed, Nonconformists in the upper reaches of the Rhymney Valley still felt that the dark shadows of the Clarendon Code lingered over moor and fen, crag and torrent of this remote upland region. They

continued, therefore, to hold secret meetings here under cover of darkness in the early decades of the eighteenth century.

NOTE – Clarendon Code – a series of laws (1661-5) designed to strengthen the Established Church (Anglican) and destroy emerging nonconformist threats.

It was during that time that Benjamin Francis's father, Enoch, was linked with Blaen Rhymney. Quoting Abel Edmunds's historical records, James Davies noted:

... a service was in progress one night in an upper room at Blaen Rhymni Fach, and that one of the worshippers had been asked to stand guard on the ground floor to warn them of the approach of an enemy. The service, however, proved too great an attraction for the would-be sentinel, so he crept quietly up the stairway to be within hearing distance of the proceedings. Meanwhile someone had entered the house, and the watchman failed to raise the alarm. The sound of heavy footsteps was heard below, and a hush fell upon the little gathering. During the interval of silence which followed, the intruder was heard repeating the words: "Ni does ofn mewn cariad; eithr y mae perffaith gariad yn bwrw allan ofn" ("There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear"). The voice was recognized as that of Enoch Francis, who had journeyed thither in the two-fold capacity of pastor and lover. The service was then continued with increased fervour, for the little flock had a warm reverence for their young shepherd.

Enoch Francis married Mary, daughter of Walter David Evans. They moved to Cardiganshire where Enoch Francis was widely respected for his character and his sermons. Predeceased by Mary, Enoch died, aged 51, in 1740, leaving Benjamin and his siblings orphaned.

MARY THOMAS: NETTING

Family name	Given name	Relationship	Age	Occupation	Residence
Mary Thomas		Head	50	Netting	Glamorgan in Merthyr Tydfil Carmarthenshire Cayo

This extract from the 1861 census return, ED 7 schedule 79, shows the entry for Mary Thomas. Then an unmarried woman, living alone in a household at Graig Fargoed, she was born in Cayo, Carmarthenshire, about 1806. Many family and local historians in Wales will appreciate how difficult it is to identify people like Mary Thomas because their given and family names were so common, but the following may refer to this lady:

- Mary Thomas, a 30-year-old live-in female servant who was not born in Glamorgan, in the household of farmer Lewis Edwards at Bedlinog at the time of the 1841 census.
- Washer woman, Mary Thomas, living alone at Pont Newydd in what may have been the same dwelling as that called Graig Fargoed in 1861), was born in Cayo about 1808.
- According to the 1871 census return, annuitant, Mary Thomas, living alone in Craig Fargoed was born in Gelligaer parish about 1804.

Readers who are not familiar with using census returns to trace individuals and/or families may raise questions regarding her age. In 1841, ages of adults were required to the nearest five years, rounded down, which puts her year of birth as 1807-11. The ages recorded on the returns for 1851-71 suggest the years of birth as 1808, 1806 and 1804, which, given the practicalities of the census, are close enough to suggest it may be the same person. The fact that she was described as an annuitant in 1871, however, casts doubt on this being the same person, as how did a life working as a live-in servant, netter and washer woman provide her with an annuity? While one can imagine the sort of work she would have done as a servant in a farmhouse in upland Glamorgan in the early Victorian era, and later as a washer woman, it is unclear what netting involved. To date, the following have been considered:

- Making net curtains
- Netting (catching) rabbits or crows

Have any readers come across others for whom the occupation is shown as netting, or are able to suggest what the work involved?

DIFFICULTIES OF TRAVELLING DURING INCLEMENT WEATHER

Readers of *Gelligaer Times* may have experienced the difficulties of travelling during inclement weather, but that was something that local nineteenth century travelers also faced. For example, early December 1885, readers of *Star of Gwent* learned that on the previous Saturday, the turnpike road in lower Ystrad Mynach was

flooded after heavy rain, the river was overflowing and the road to Twyn Shon Ifan (on the other side of the river in Bedwas parish) was inundated.

STEALING A CurrANT LOAF

In April 1877, *Star of Gwent* reported that Henry Roberts, aged 14, son of Nicholas Roberts, was charged with stealing a currant loaf from the shop of John Edwards, Halfway House, on the previous Saturday. On noticing the loaf was missing, Mrs. Edwards looked out of the window and saw him hide it in the hedge. The newspaper item concluded *Case remanded*.

HISTORY OF LOCAL HISTORY IN AND NEAR GELLIGAER PARISH

By Annie Owen

To celebrate GHS's Diamond Jubilee, Society members and friends researched and published *PARISH OF GELLIGAER IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY*, a 316-page hardback volume launched at a ZOOM event on Monday 22 November 2021, sixty years to the day after, as noted in the Society's first publication, *The Society was formally inaugurated at a meeting held at the Council Offices, Hengoed*. The Society's Golden Jubilee was marked ten years earlier when another hardback volume, *BARGOED AND GILFACH A LOCAL HISTORY*, a 336-page study of the parish's largest urban area, was launched with some style at a well-attended event in Lewis School Pengam. In addition, the Society marked both jubilees with year-long programmes, in 2011-12 and 2021-22, devoted to talks on local subjects attracting considerable interest among members and visitors, so bearing witness to the fact that interest in local history and heritage is thriving in the area during the first quarter of the twenty-first century.

The aim of this essay is to set the experience of GHS in context within the history of local history and to offer an explanation of why it was established when it was.

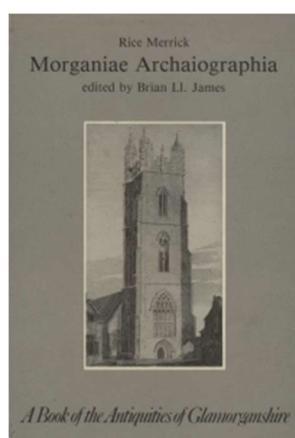
History is one of civilization's oldest subjects, but the same is not true for local history. While medieval chroniclers mentioned localities in the context of political or military events and religious bodies, and there was some genealogical information, there appears to have been little interest in detailing local events, and the local references were not local history. Medieval people had scant concern for topography and although they sometimes described a site in words, they rarely created maps or plans of localities.

During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the revolution in learning embraced a change in the way in which history was viewed. For example, and more so in England than was possible for Wales, some lawyers turned antiquarian and searched central government archives for references to their county and especially to matters concerned with landownership. At the same time, there was a fascination for genealogy, but it is clear that not all the resulting family trees were based on sound research. Thus, from the sixteenth to at least the mid-nineteenth century, local history was focused on the county and the landed gentry.

Leaving aside any discussion and judgement on how the landed gentry lived their lives, it can be noted that many of them (including those members who became Anglican clergy) were interested in history and heritage. Their interest lay in their county, which for most of them was the compass of their social and economic lives and their sphere of influence: as J.P.s they maintained law and order in their county in Quarter Sessions, and as M.P.s they represented it at Westminster. While Wales in general, including the counties of south-east Wales, did not see the breadth and depth of research that took place in some English counties, there were important works relating to the south-east counties.

Since the early 1980s, some such works have been edited and re-published by [South Wales Record Society](#). SWRS's first publication, in 1983, was *Morganiae Archaiographia*, an edition of Rice Merrick's *Book of Glamorganshire's Antiquities*.

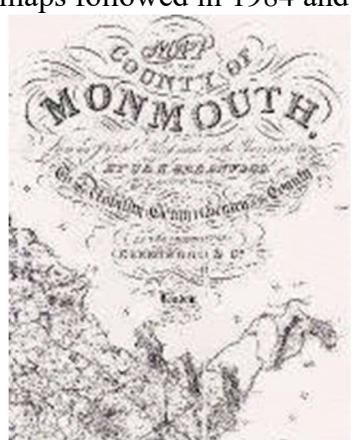
Although it may not compare well with William Lambarde's *Kent* (England's earliest county history published 1576) nor William Dugdale's *Warwickshire* (published 1656, and, with both county-wide and parish-by-parish studies, arguably the best of its genre), Merrick's work of 1578 stands as the earliest written history of a Welsh county. This publication, edited by Brian Ll. James, is based on six transcripts and extracts (the original manuscript having been lost), and is much more complete and accurate than the 1825 and 1887 editions. Born into an enterprising yeoman family in Bonvilston, Rice Merrick was a man of the Bro, but he did not ignore the Blaenau



in his book. For example, Gelligaer and its five hamlets are mentioned, as are the neighbouring parishes of Merthyr Tydfil and Llanfabon.



Facsimiles of two useful county maps followed in 1984 and 1985. Publishing jointly with Glamorgan Archive Service, SWRS produced a facsimile of the first one-inch map of Glamorgan, surveyed in the 1790s by George Yates and published in 1799 by John Cary of London, reprinted in 12 sheets with an introductory essay, and sold with covers and a slide binder. The next year saw a facsimile of a rare one-



inch map of Monmouthshire, one of a series of distinguished county maps surveyed and published by C. and J. Greenwood, in 1830. The facsimile, published on four sheets, is accompanied by an introductory essay by Philip Riden. As the map-makers produced county maps largely for a gentry market, they did not include features lying outside the county boundaries, and so although Gelligaer has a long border with Monmouthshire, Gelligaer, and other Glamorgan locations are not marked on the Greenwood map.

Rice Merrick's work remained the sole county history of Glamorgan until the later twentieth century, but Breconshire and Monmouthshire, the counties which border Gelligaer, both had county histories in the intervening era:-

- Theophilus Jones's *History of the County of Brecknock*, was published in the first decade of the nineteenth century. A short account of the life and work of Theophilus Jones is available online at [JONES, THEOPHILUS \(1759 - 1812\), the historian of Brecknock | Dictionary of Welsh Biography](#)
- Archdeacon William Coxe's *An Historical Tour in Monmouthshire* was published in two volumes in 1801. Merton Priory Press's facsimile edition -- see [An Historical Tour in Monmouthshire by Archdeacon William Coxe \(mertonpriory.co.uk\)](#) -- with an introduction by Jeremy Knight, includes a list of subscribers, a once-common feature of local history publications that has fallen out of favour in more recent times.
- Joseph Bradney's *A History of Monmouthshire: From the coming of the Normans into Wales down to the present time*, comprising four volumes, each in two parts, was published between 1904 and his death in 1933. He left his history of the county incomplete as, although having prepared notes on the Hundred of Newport (i.e. that part of Monmouthshire that borders Glamorgan), he had not written the volume. His notes, discovered in the National Library of Wales, were the basis for a volume five dealing with all 17 parishes in the Hundred of Newport that was compiled by Madeleine Gray and published jointly by SWRS and the National Library of Wales in 1993. This, like some other out-of-print SWRS publications is available online at [Publications of the South Wales Record Society | No. 8, Monmouthshire | 1993 | Welsh Journals - The National Library of Wales](#)

During the later eighteenth and early nineteenth century, there was a romantic approach to local studies. *Merthyr Historian*, the journal of Merthyr Tydfil Historical Society, has carried critical accounts of the work of some of the artists and writers, who, fearful of making the *Grand Tour* into a somewhat turbulent contemporary Europe, were attracted by the new industrial sights and sounds in Merthyr Tydfil and Dowlais. Gelligaer parish attracted few such visitors, partly because there was little to draw them into a parish that lacked easy communication routes. One exception is Penry Williams's painting *South Wales Industrial Landscape*, a mid-1820s view from lower Rhymney, over the emerging Pontlottyn towards Troedrhiwfuwch farm and hillside see [South Wales industrial landscape" Penry Williams - Artwork on USEUM](#).

Concern about the preservation of central government archives prompted the establishment, in 1838, of the Public Record Office (PRO), forerunner of what is now The National Archives at Kew. The PRO took over the work of editing and publishing lists, indexes and calendars of many medieval sources. Any similar interest in preserving local archives (e.g. in the counties) was not translated into practice until after the end of the First World War, although the establishment of Wales's national library and museum may be cited in opposition to this statement.

The approach to local history and heritage began to change in the mid-nineteenth century. Various economic and social factors, including the nationwide railway network, the emergence of a new professional middle class eager to use their time and skills on a new hobby, namely archaeological and historical research, and a technological revolution in the printing trade, combined to take local history research in new directions during the half century or so prior to the outbreak of the First World War. While the landed gentry and aristocrats retained their interest and generally continued to provide leadership and financial backing, the emphasis shifted from studying documents to focusing on objects and sites. Improved transport across the country meant that many interesting sites, formerly little-known and often inaccessible to all but local people and a few brave pioneers, were within reach of a wider group of people. These local historians, predominantly but not exclusively men, travelled by train, or sometimes bicycle, to admire old and new built environments.

In the local area, and as noted in *PARISH OF GELLIGAER IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY*, the new-builds of Ystrad Mynach's Holy Trinity Church and Hengoed Viaduct were much admired by rail passengers in the late 1850s. *BRITHDIR YESTERYEAR IN AN UPPER RHYMNEY VALLEY COMMUNITY* (p 73) includes a description of a 1906 visit by South Wales Teachers' Rambling Association when local teachers met the visitors at Brithdir railway station and accompanied them on the steep climb to Capel y Brithdir and the Tegernacus Stone, sites formerly seen only by those living locally or the few travellers on the ridgeway track.

The teachers were just one group of middle-class professionals not only interested in such sites but also keen to form societies or associations to pursue their new hobby alongside other like-minded people, especially architects, surveyors, engineers, scientists, photographers, lawyers, and financiers, as well as Anglican clergy. And, having formed associations, they produced journals, possibly not only because of the abilities, skills and enthusiasm of their members, but also because of cheap and efficient printing and publishing in the decades before the outbreak of the First World War, as well as the patronage of the county gentry, and, sometimes, aristocracy.

One of the earliest such groups was Caerleon Antiquarian Association, later to become Monmouthshire Antiquarian Association (MAA) which had its origins in late 1840s and opened its museum in Caerleon in 1850.



Cambrian Archaeological Association
Cymdeithas Hynafiaethau Cymru
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One of the better-known associations was the Wales-wide Cambrian Archaeological Association (CAA) which was founded in 1846 and is still active at the time of writing, see [Cambrian Archaeological Association – One of the oldest societies in Wales and the Marches](#)

[devoted to the study of the history and archaeology of the Principality. \(cambrians.org.uk\)](#). It aimed to examine, preserve and illustrate the ancient monuments and remains of the history, language, manners, customs, arts and industries of Wales and the Marches and to educate the public in such matters. Since its foundation the Association published an annual journal, *Archaeologia Cambrensis*, with scholarly articles on a range of archaeological and historical topics. The following, the opening of an article by T.S., appearing in *Archaeologia Cambrensis* April 1862 (pp 130-4), serves to illustrate its numerous articles about Gelligaer's history and heritage. This and many more articles, some illustrated with detailed drawings by the professional architects and surveyors among the membership, from journals published pre-2000 are available online [Welsh Journals - Home \(library.wales\)](#).

The half century prior to the outbreak of WWI, with the green shoots of a broader based interest in local history and heritage within Gelligaer parish at the same time as parish-based local administration, could have seen the establishment of a Gelligaer historical society. News reports, articles and letters in the local and regional press not only displayed contemporary interest outside the gentry class, but also disseminated information in a form accessible to the era's new reading public.

- *Gelligaer Times* issue 49 November 2020 asked its readers *SHOULD GEORGE SEABORNE BE AN HONORARY MEMBER OF GHS?* as his plea (in an article in *Western Mail* in September 1898) for a scholarly enthusiast with leisure to settle down in it [Gelligaer parish] to find out and tell us all that is

ON AN INSCRIBED STONE AT CAPEL BRITHDIR, GLAMORGANSHIRE.

I HAD often heard of a remarkable inscribed stone at Capel Brithdir, near Gelligaer, and had seen very grotesque sketches and interpretations of the stone and its inscription, when, in May last, I resolved to visit the place, and see whether it might not form an appropriate subject for a paper to be read at this meeting.

This stone, mentioned by the Rev. John Griffith at the Bangor meeting, stands in a very desolate spot in a district difficult of access, and does not seem to have attracted the attention of any competent antiquary. I made my way thither from the Hengoed Junction, taking the Rhymney railway as far as Tir Phil station; then ascending the Cefn Brithdir ridge, I came to Capel Brithdir, a small chapel frequented apparently by but

available online [Welsh Journals - Home \(library.wales\)](#)

possible of the history was not dissimilar to that of the founding fathers of GHS. Seaborne's illustrated article about Maen Hir stimulated much debate in *Western Mail* in the following weeks. An industrialist and businessman, Seaborne was just one of many similar people to take an active interest in local archaeology. Revd T. J. Jones, rector of Gelligaer, was another well-known local person with such interest, aroused in part by the Roman remains discovered in his Rectory garden. Much has been written about the Roman presence in the parish and GHS's most recent contribution to that debate is that of Clive Andrewartha in *PARISH OF GELLIGAER IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY*.

- While researchers behind GHS's Diamond Jubilee publication are indebted to the work of some pre-WWI local historians, they regret the fact that much more of that valuable local heritage has probably been lost. The work of William Lewis Williams (*Gwilym Craig-y-Tyle*), *History of Rhymney Valley from Pontlottyn to Hengoed*, submitted in manuscript to Troedrhiwfuwch eisteddfod in 1874, has survived and, while not everything in it stands up to scrutiny, it remains a valuable source. Contemporary press reports show that it is likely that many dozens, possibly hundreds, of similar works were written but have not survived. *History of Penybank (Gelligaer 24 2017 pp 22-3)* includes a biography of Richard Owen (c.1844-1916) based on two extant manuscript entries to Deri Silver Band 1916 eisteddfod's essay competition. They have survived in private hands, and one wonders how GHS can discover what else has survived.

Some of the pre-WWI green shoots withered while others died during the social, economic and political upheaval of the First World War and difficult decades that followed. While national societies, like CAA, and some county societies continued, the more local research activities were thwarted by lack of leadership (from gentry, established church and middle class) and prohibitive costs of printing and publishing. However, it was not an entirely barren period:-

- A few pioneers led the way in showing that local history research was best done by using documents, artefacts and maps, a blend that had not sat well in the later nineteenth century when objects and sites were regarded as more worthwhile and rewarding than documents. Such pioneers included W.G. Hoskins and M.W. Beresford in England, and the Bridgend lawyer, Henry John Randall, in south Wales – for more on the latter see [RANDALL, HENRY JOHN \(HARRY; 1877 - 1964\), lawyer and historian | Dictionary of Welsh Biography](#) Randall's 1936 *History in the open air*, was part of his attempt to encourage local historians to study documents and archaeology as well as maps.
- Local authorities paid increasing attention to preserving local historical records, both those created by the local authority and those created by individuals and groups within their area. In 1938 Monmouthshire appointed a consultant to take care of its county records, and in 1939 Glamorgan County Council set up Glamorgan Record Office. For further information about the former, now Gwent Archives and housed in modern premises in Ebbw Vale, see www.gwentarchives.gov.uk/about-us.aspx, and about the latter, now Glamorgan Archives and housed in modern premises in Leckwith, see [Glamorgan Record Office, 1939-1989 – a celebration postponed – Glamorgan Archives \(wordpress.com\)](http://Glamorgan%20Record%20Office,%201939-1989%20-%20a%20celebration%20postponed%20-%20Glamorgan%20Archives%20(wordpress.com)).

Post-WWII, local history took a new direction countrywide:-

- Standing Conference for Local History, formed in 1948, evolved into the British Conference for Local History (BALH) in 1952, a body that, at the time of writing, continues to stimulate interest and encourage good practice in local history studies
- Many university extra-mural departments and other adult further and higher education bodies offered local history courses
- *Local Studies* by J.R. Armstrong and P.G.H. Hopkins, was published by Workers' Education Association (W.E.A.) in 1955

This post-WWII interest in local history was reflected in and near Gelligaer as witnessed, for example, *Gelligaer 24 2017 pp 86-117 Glan-y-nant, Pengam – A 1947 Survey* was based on the text of Margaret Boulton's individual work submitted for Final Examination for Certificate in Glamorgan Training College, Barry. Her original was deposited in Bargoed Library, but how many other such works remain in private hands, or have been discarded with household rubbish?

The new Elizabethan era was a time of optimism and fresh starts, and it is against that background that several new groups emerged. Glamorgan History Society came into being in the early 1950s, and a generation later, the multi-volume *Glamorgan County History*, serves to illustrate a new focus on the county. This was also the time when a number of new local groups were formed across the county.

- Encouraged by Gelligaer Urban District Council's (GUDC) enthusiasm to celebrate its Golden Jubilee, a pioneering group of local historians researched and prepared *The Gelligaer Story*, described in the Foreword by Ness Edwards, then M.P. for Caerphilly Division, as the *first attempt at writing a continuous history of the ancient Parish of Gelligaer from the dawn of civilisation to the present time*. Financed and published by GUDC, *The Gelligaer Story* proved popular in the community and was widely used in local schools. Those same historians were the people who established GHS in 1961. The story of GHS over the six decades since then is told by Judith Jones in *Gelligaer Historical Society – a brief history* in *Gelligaer* 27 (2020), a journal published in the midst of one of the more difficult situations to face the Society, namely the Covid pandemic. The Society, like all other groups, could not hold face-to-face meetings, and so lost opportunities to promote its publications, a crucial element in its financial well-being. Initially, thinking it would be (to adapt a popular slogan at the start of the First World War) *all over by the AGM*, the Society attempted to keep in touch with members through regular issues of *Gelligaer Times*, the Society's newsletter established in January 2006 by the then-chairman Terry McCarthy. Later, through the efforts of Judith Jones in securing speakers, and the technical expertise of Sandy Halliday, Zoom meetings were set up. Both initiatives proved popular with members and friends of the Society. The Society's Diamond Jubilee year was launched by GHS President, Dr. Elin Jones, at the end of GHS's June 2021 Zoom meeting. In September 2021, GHS opened its Diamond Jubilee programme of talks with a strong local theme with a hybrid meeting, some attending in Llancaiaach Fawr and others joining on Zoom.

- GHS was not the first local history society in the area as, according to information on its website - [Home \(caerphillylocalhistorysociety.co.uk\)](http://caerphillylocalhistorysociety.co.uk) Caerphilly Local History Society was set up in October 1957 with the aim of encouraging interest in the history of the Caerphilly area. To this day, the Society is dedicated to the recording, researching, sharing and preservation of the history of our town and surrounding areas. The website shows that the Society has published nine journals as well as numerous works by individuals including stalwarts such as Glyndwr G. Jones and Dennis Sellwood.



- Cynon Valley History Society was founded on 11 March 1971 and, in 2021, its *Old Aberdare* volume XI, with a fiftieth anniversary editorial by David Leslie Davies, is inscribed *This anniversary volume is dedicated to all who helped found the Cynon Valley History Society in March 1971 and who have helped sustain it during the past fifty years*. It has a range of interesting articles on Aberdare's Little Theatre, poet Alun Lewis, cartoonist Reuben Silverman, Dr. Alistair Wilson's view of Aberdare, trade union pioneer, John Ewington, and Aberdare 'Town Plan' 1957-63. In addition to the journal, the Society has, over the decades published a number of other works including a quarterly newsletter *Hanes* as well as two weighty and well-researched tomes, namely *CYNON COAL HISTORY OF A MINING VALLEY* (2001) and *CHAPELS OF THE CYNON VALLEY* (2004). Further information is available on [Cynon Valley History Society: a history society for Aberdare and district \(cvhs.org.uk\)](http://cvhs.org.uk)



- Merthyr Tydfil Historical Society came into being in 1972 to advance the education of the public by promoting the study of the local history and architecture of Merthyr Tydfil, as noted on its website [Merthyr Tydfil Historical Society \(mths.co.uk\)](http://mths.co.uk). Its journal *Merthyr Historian* first appeared in 1976, and volume 31 was published in 2021. Initially edited by Joseph Gross, it was edited from 1992-2015 by T.F. Holley and more recently, jointly by Christine Trevett and Huw Williams. The contents of the issues appear on the website. On 26 March 2022, MTHS stalwart Huw Williams will be the M.C. when MTHS celebrates its 50th Anniversary at a daytime event in Guest Keen Club, with a buffet lunch, guest speakers, Clive Thomas and Dr. Daryl Leeworthy, and the launch of Christine Trevett's *Dowlais Educational Settlement and the Quaker John Dennithorne*.



Thus, GHS was one of four east Glamorgan local history societies that came into being in the first twenty-five years of the second Elizabethan era. The ways the societies have developed since their formation reflect some of the changes in society over the decades. During the first quarter of the twenty-first century, their research work has been helped not only with the improved research facilities in repositories such as the county archives, National Library of Wales and The National Archives, and constantly developing technology such as mobile phones and ipads with camera aiding easier and speedier research, but also by the increasing range of sources available online. It may be noted that the online sources provided a valuable lifeline for seasoned researchers and a way into local and/or family history research for some newcomers during the lengthy lockdowns of the post-March 2020 pandemic.

Among the numerous other developments to enhance the study of local history and heritage lies Glamorgan-Gwent Archaeological Trust (GGAT), one of Wales's four such bodies to emerge in the mid-1970s to provide enhanced archaeological and heritage services.

The early twenty-first century has seen some new local history societies emerge in and near Gelligaer parish. Tending to have a very local interest, such groups include Fleur-de-Lys History Society which came into being to publish the researches of a successful W.E.A. local history class inspired by the community's interest in the local primary school's centenary. The Society has published two volumes relating to the history of their community and the surrounding area, and currently maintains a lively Facebook presence as well as a regular programme of activities. The publications of Darran Valley History Group include two volumes of *A HISTORY OF THE DARRAN VALLEY IN PHOTOGRAPHS*. The Group is active in commemorating the history of the valley's communities as witnessed by their work on the centenary of the Darran House Mine disaster, the local war memorials in Deri and Fochriw, and, most recently, the information board on the now-lost community of Penybank. At the time of writing, the *lost community* of Troedrhiwfuwch, the subject of a history in *Gelligaer* 22 (2015) pp 111-169, is part of an interesting community study in association with Swansea University, and like many other local communities maintains an active Facebook presence that stimulates memories and offers insights into local history, especially through photographs.

During its six decades, GHS has witnessed some high and low points, but it is hoped that its founders would not only understand the ways in which it has ridden the storms but also approve the directions in which its leaders have guided it over the years. It is hoped that GHS and the other groups mentioned in this short essay continue to research the history and heritage of their communities for many decades to come.

NEWS FROM OTHER HISTORY/HERITAGE GROUPS

Ruperra Zoom Talks – a reminder to contact patjonesjenkins@googlemail.com if you wish to join any of the Zoom talks listed in *Gelligaer Times* 60.

Merthyr Tydfil Historical Society -- you can keep up-to-date with the lecture programme by visiting [MTHSprogram.pdf](https://merthyrtynfilheritage.blogspot.com/2021/09/forthcoming-events-in-and-around.html) or, go to <https://merthyrtynfilheritage.blogspot.com/2021/09/forthcoming-events-in-and-around.html> for more up-to-date information on MTHS's meetings as well as those of other similar groups in Taff and Cynon valleys, and including GHS.