

# Gelligaer Times

## Newsletter of the Gelligaer Historical Society

No. 5

January 2007

A New Year and restoration of the Newsletter schedule. Still no other contributions received, has no one anything else to say? The Society still needs a Publicity Officer to tell others in the community about our activities. Can you help?

Since publication of Gelligaer Times No. 4 there have been two further meetings. In November, Edwina Stack told us of Queen Victoria's early life and how she came to the throne, despite not being the daughter of the monarch.

It all started with George III. Like all kings he needed an heir and a spare! Marrying a German princess he achieved this target by siring 15 children. His children had a strict upbringing. Unsurprisingly, when they reached their majority they rebelled, discovered 'credit' and became serious debtors. Notwithstanding this, Prince George, Prince of Wales was under no illusion that his duty was also to produce an heir. From a choice of two eligible brides, he chose Caroline of Brunswick, whom he described as 'fat and ugly' amongst other pleasantries! They stayed together long enough to produce an heir – Princess Charlotte. She married for love, but she and her baby died in child birth. Thus the Prince of Wales had no heir.

The nation looked to the other princes. The Duke of York was married but had no children. The Duke of Clarence lived with a lady and had 15, illegitimate children. The Duke of Kent had a happy marriage, but was childless. The Duke of Cumberland, an unpleasant character was not legally married and Adolphus was not married. Spurred on by 'need', 'old' wives were dispensed with, new wives were sought and the race was on to be first to produce an heir!

Edward, Duke of Kent married, Victoise, his brother's sister-in-law in 1818. In 1819 they had a daughter. At the christening the Prince Regent rejected all names except Alexandrina and Victoria. After a 'gypsy existence' the indebted Kents settled in Sidmouth, but soon after the Duke of Kent died, followed by the King.

The Duchess returned to Kensington Palace, by which time Victoria was recognised as heir. In the meantime, John Conroy became the Duchess' aide and virtually ruled the household.

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### Officers of Gelligaer History Society 2006-07:

President  
Chairman  
Secretary  
Treasurer

Mr Islwyn Hughes  
Mr Terry McCarthy  
Mrs Jean Kember  
Mrs Hazel Waters

**Membership - £5 per year – non members are welcome, but a contribution of £1 per lecture would be appreciated to defray expenses.**

**(continued from p1)**

Victoria's education continued, being taught a wide range of subjects. Throughout, John Conroy worked to extend his influence.

George IV died in 1830, to be succeeded by his brother William. In dispute with the King neither the Duchess nor Victoria attended William IV's coronation. Meanwhile, Conroy took Victoria around the 'big' houses, as recorded in Victoria's journal. When 16, Victoria almost died from typhoid fever and during her slow recovery, Conroy attempted to inveigle Victoria into promising him the role of Queen's Private Secretary – she refused.

During the King's final illness both Duchess and Conroy urged Victoria to retain a regent – the Duchess. When the King died, 20/06/1837, the Duchess tried to prevent Victoria being told the news, but she insisted and entered the room to be told she was Queen. Tradition relates, she had a weep, was alone for an hour, ordered her mother's bed be taken from her room and sacked Sir John Conroy, all before her first Privy Council meeting! Later, at 11.00, a small girl entered the room and regally went through the procedures, greatly impressing the Council. The rest they say is history.

The December meeting, in common with that held in November, considered the start of a process; the saving of a notable building in the borough – Llancaiach Fawr. Jeremy Love, retired architect told us of the most successful project of its type in which he was professionally involved. He emphasised, that preservation of a building was a process involving many stages.

When he first came to Cardiff in 1964 to teach in the Welsh School of Architecture, no one knew anything about Llancaiach Fawr. At that time architectural history was not significant thus many interesting buildings were lost, e.g. Bridgend Town Hall, as Local Authorities did not value old buildings. Awareness was first raised, when two students produced 10 drawings of Llancaiach Fawr for their professional exam portfolio. Some were published by J.B. Hilling in 1973 and seen by John Eynon, conservationist who had restored the Orangery in Margam and advised on Bute Town.

1975, European Architectural Heritage Year, was a catalyst for bringing many 'obscure' Welsh buildings into public view. Jeremy Lowe investigating buildings around Blaenavon Iron Works, came into contact with the Planning Officer of the Rhymney Valley District Council, who asked him to join a committee which brought him into contact with Llancaiach Fawr. Mrs Williams, owner, approached R.V.D.C. with view to a sale – the timing was fortunate, coinciding with publication of a seminal work on 'Houses of the Welsh Countryside'. Mrs Williams had gained support of Councillor Howard Edwards. Jeremy related his first visit to Llancaiach Fawr, when the house's potential was covered over. Nevertheless, his report was favourable and his plans and enthusiasm encouraged R.V.D.C. to buy the property in 1979. The School of Architecture was appointed as architects.

In 1981 Jeremy organised the Historical Architecture Annual Conference in Cardiff and took over 100 delegates and councillors to Llancaiach Fawr putting the scheme 'on the map'. Alwyn Jones, appointed project officer, applied the strict code of practice for Historical Buildings, i.e. 'repair rather than replace, replace with work to the same specification'. Project engineers good – Sydney Opera House and restoration of St. George's Chapel, Windsor. While under restoration, much came to light, e.g. second stair case, dais in dining room, sanitary arrangements etc. They also began to 'see' the organisation of a 16<sup>th</sup> century house.

Jeremy ceased to be involved with project in 1980s, but is delighted with what has been done.

**Interesting website:**

[www.walespast.com](http://www.walespast.com) various articles presented, including one on Gelligaer Fort.

## **Gelligaer Volume XVI**

Fred and John Holley have produced a mock-up of Volume XVI – 96 pages long. After proof reading and other adjustments, the copy will be ready for final printing. Then we shall have to secure quotes and, hopefully, grant help to produce the final product, for an Easter launch?

Articles include: Tribal Princes of Senghenydd Supra & their Descendants; Letters to & from America & the Welsh National Anthem; Lewis family of Killfach Vargoed; What rises up ... Closure of Bedwelty School; Fochriw, Pontlloftyn & Rhymney Brass Bands; The Norman Church – not just at Gelligaer; Thanks Goodness for Alcohol; N.L.W. Document LL/CC/G/758; Fleur-de-Lys: Immigrants from Somerset & Gloucestershire, 1976 Drought Recalled.

Copies of Volume XV, published January 2006 are still available– cost £4. However, copies of Vol XIV are in short supply. Any unsold copies, please return to Terry McCarthy.

Index for Vols. I-XV, copies available £1. The Society does not have a complete collection Journals of its own, but Bargoed Library has a complete set. If articles from past issues are required, we can arrange photocopies to be produced at 50p per page.

### **Digital Story telling**

In November TM was contacted by Paula Major of 'Breaking Barriers' about this project. The idea is that trained facilitators would establish a 'story circle' to generate short (250 words) stories which can be turned into a script and ultimately a short 'film' using digital technology. Paula is looking for facilitators to train in the process; including use of software. Might there be people within the Society who might be interested – oral history potential? TM attended their 'Showcase' in Blackwood Institute in mid January, which suggested the scheme has possibilities.

### **Trysor & Community Archives**

A number of members attended a seminar in Bargoed Library, 16/01/2007, presented by trysor on behalf of Glamorgan Record Office. A software program, Commanet, was demonstrated to show how local archives might be created by groups such as ours.

### **Grants etc.**

Clive Andewartha and TM have completed an application for grant help towards setting-up and maintaining a web site. We are on the reserve list for 2006-07 – success in 2007-08 financial year? On 02/02/07 we are meeting Helen Kell for advice about our grant applications including grants to help finance Gelligaer Vol. XVI – or sponsors.

The Communities First Trust Fund grant application we were asked to lead for a feasibility study for the future development of the Gelligaer Roman Fort site, has been completed and despatched.

### **Conference June 2007**

TM and Chris Morgans are meeting in Llancaiach Fawr on 08/02/07 to consider the proposals for a Conference/Summer School later this year. Once a date has been negotiated an invitation list of other Local/Family History Groups will be finalised and despatched. At least one other organisation might be prepared to co-sponsor the event.

### **An Alternative Venue?**

In view of Bargoed Library's uncertain future, plus the likelihood of us needing a base for activities such as web site production, the committee are investigating alternative venues. Llancaiach Fawr could be available at a cost. Other possibilities include: Hengoed Community Centre, The Settlement (Bargoed) and .... Have you any suggestions?

## Gelligaer Historical Society

### Launch of Fleur-de-Lys – book produced by Fleur-de-Lys History Society 8 December – Fleur-de-Lys Community Centre.

The Chairman was invited to this auspicious event. The book was launched formally by Doug Touhig M.P., whereupon sales and the buffet opened! Sales of the book, costing £9.95, were rapid after the formalities were concluded. Sufficient photographs were taken of the event to fill a Volume II in one go!

The book itself is a well-presented soft cover volume of 108 pages, produced by Old Bakehouse Publications. A wide range of topics are covered, starting with a brief outline the origins, then a more detailed exposition of some early influences: John Hodder Moggridge, the Rumney Tramroad and the coal industry. Some extracts from the Government Commissioners Report of 1842 into conditions in the mining industry (they visited at least one pit in the 'Flower' area), give an insight into life in the 1840s. Until the 20<sup>th</sup> century most collieries were small and short-lived, but the large collieries at Britannia and Pengam had a more profound impact.

Analysis of the Parish Tithe Awards and Census Enumerators returns provided insights into life in the area in the 1840s, as well as demonstrating how the population was structured, its origins and sizes of households.

Following this was a section considering various aspects of life in 'Flower' post 1919, featuring local churches, including West Country links with Methodism in the village, Sunday School outings, and Schools. Thereafter, a range of smaller articles considered doctors, pubs, the brewery, entertainments, sports, shopping and shops and personal memories.

All was copiously illustrated by a range of well-reproduced photographs. All in all, a very worth-while booklet, which sheds more light on life in this interesting village community.

One final comment. A neighbour, 'Flower' born, was adamant the village name has been spelled incorrectly; it should be Fleur-de-Lis, as shown on a number of local road signs and maps. The book gives no justification for their choice of spelling, the village name, other than the suggestion it is known as such to 'most local people'. Another item for Volume II?

### Meetings 2006-07 – Bargoed Library 19.30.

2007

Wednesday	31 January	Tribal Princes of Senghenydd Supra & their Descendants, Jean Kember
Wednesday	28 February	Heraldry – The Shorthand of History 2, Anthony Jones.
Wednesday	28 March	The Vikings in Wales, David Wyatt.
Wednesday	25 April	South Wales Railways in World War II, Terry McCarthy
Wednesday	30 May	AGM

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