

# Gelligaer Times

## Newsletter of the Gelligaer Historical Society

No. 7

July 2007

Well summer has arrived! The rains arrived too, quite a lot of it, but not the same quantities which deluged the West Midlands and Yorkshire. So far as I am aware no weather records have been broken, despite the frequencies and amounts of rainfall reported. History shows us there have been worse years – June 1903 is the record-holder, I believe,

Since the April edition, there have been but two meetings to report. The first, in April, was Terry McCarthy's exposition on the Railways in south Wales during World War II. As he pointed out at the beginning, it proved one of the most difficult lectures to prepare as the information, if it even exists, is incomplete, scattered and not easy to access. Furthermore, Terry commented upon the high prices being charged for photographic images from certain national (Wales, as well as U.K) repositories.

Terry's aim was to demonstrate, mainly using pictures, how the railways coped with the demands of six years of total war in the south Wales area and with what outcomes.

War was declared on Sunday 3 September 1939. On 1 September 1939, invoking powers embodied in the Emergency Powers (Defence) Act, 1939, the Government issued the Emergency (Railway Control) Order 1939, so placing the railway companies (plus LPTB) under the control of the Railway Executive Committee (set-up 24/09/1938 – Munich crisis). At that time, the railways were privately owned and operated, had barely recovered from the privations of the Great War, were afflicted by the consequences of the economic depression affecting their staple customers and almost unfettered competition from road transport.

The main features of the 1930s railway scene; main directions of traffic flow, sources of traffic etc. led on to some illustrations of how the onset of war began to impinge on the railways, e.g. delivery of Anderson bomb shelters from Llanelli and the scrap drive.

War brought many changes, especially following the end of the 'phoney war'. Diversion of coal traffic from ports towards London put pressure on existing facilities and to meet this the GWR quadrupled the mainline Newport to Severn Tunnel Junction to handle this and other new traffic. South Wales ports generally associated with export of coal saw increased general traffic through docks; imports of equipment, oil and food distributed quickly (from convoys) and exports of materiel for campaigns, notably North Africa and Overlord. Imports in 1943, were 45% up on 1938 – exports in 1944 up 255% on 1938, but coal exports declined 33%. This had a huge impact on dock and rail facilities and emphasized the reorientation of predominant traffic flows to W – E. Overall, freight traffic engine hours in 1944 were 45% above 1938.

Passenger flows were altered Mainline services reduced, e.g. Cardiff-London, frequency 60% down, journey times 10% slower, delays more frequent, train loadings greater. Secondary routes  
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were similarly affected. In addition there were many troop specials, and in the early years trains bringing evacuees. Passenger traffic to and from ROF; Bridgend, Glascoed, Caerwent, Hirwaun, included both ammunition and passengers in large numbers

The railways were under pressure, maintenance was reduced - railway workshops undertook war work, e.g. bomb-case machining and repair of ambulance trains, as well as 'normal' locomotive maintenance. There was a growing shortage of male labour, thus more women employed.

Capture of northern France enabled the Luftwaffe's bombers to reach targets in western Britain. Docks were prime targets, notably Cardiff and Swansea. Disruption of rail facilities at the former led to establishment of inland storage depots, e.g. St. Mellon's, GWR worked traffic to and fro this centre. Also construction of additional coal storage sidings on land adjoining docks. Urban areas, notably Cardiff and Swansea 'Blitz' saw civilian lives disrupted, particularly railwaymen - very stressful. Route ways were disrupted, thus need for diversions placed pressure on 'control'. Air raid alerts and blackout, too, induced high levels of stress.

A sad casualty was S.S. St. Patrick, GWR steamer bombed and sunk *en route* to Fishguard from Rosslare, June 1941 - 17 crew and 12 passengers lost.

From mid 1942 the influence of the U.S.A. increased. South Wales provided the main ports for lend lease and US services convoys requiring transport to their British bases. The variety of traffic through ports increased, especially for the North African and Overlord campaigns. Amongst the imports were locomotives - readied for traffic at Ebbw Junction (US Army took over part of GWR depot) and stored on redundant local railway lines (mainly former Barry Railway routes) prior to embarkation for Europe. For training, one redundant west Wales route used by USAAF. In addition, Ambulance trains worked to south Wales, US Army hospitals, e.g. Rhydlafar, Cardiff

At the Peace the railways were badly run down - essential maintenance only, for 6 years. Funding was limited - financial settlements 'negotiated' by Government under terms of the 1939 Order worked to disadvantage of railway companies, i.e. income fell far short of actual expenditure. Traffic flows had been re-orientated permanently - west to east dominant post war, reinforcing decline in valley routes and their associated dock bound export traffic. The labour force was exhausted. The General public's experience of overcrowded, slow, dirty and much delayed wartime travel by rail mitigated against rail travel post war - flocked to private car when conditions permitted. New industries e.g. trading estates etc. benefited from experience of using road transport for small, low bulk high-value commodities thus moved from rail side locations.

The railways' efforts won justified praise from Sir Winston Churchill, Prime Minister, 1945. Sadly, Hugh Dalton, Labour Chancellor of the Exchequer was less kind in 1946 - 'The railway system of ours is a very poor bag of assets'. Shortly after the railways were given their reward - they were nationalised.

#### **A.G.M. - Report of meeting Wednesday 30 May 2007 - Bargoed Library**

Another well attended and positive A.G.M. Officers reports were presented virtually without comment. The Chairman reviewing the 2006-07 Development Plan indicated that many of this years plans had been achieved or were close to being so. Funding had increased, helped by grants and one donation, as had membership. Meetings had been well-received and attendances generally up. Progress had been made in establishing a web site, insofar as grant aid had been approved - equipment and training had yet to be received. Volume XVI of the Journal was ready for sale, subject to an official launch and a conference was planned for September.

Offering themselves for re-election all officers were duly re-elected for 2007-08. A committee was set-up from willing volunteers, but the post of publicity officer, sadly, remains unfilled.

Following the elections, the Chairman revisited the Development Plan, suggesting that we should continue to seek new funding and members, the latter particularly amongst young people. Consideration of a Vol. XVII for Christmas 2008 was mooted, as well as attempting to make the conference an annual event.

It was proposed and accepted that the annual subscription should rise to £6 per annum, to help with the additional expense of producing Journals, our contribution towards conference costs and the need to pay for our new meeting venue at Llancaiach Fawr. It was also agreed that Journal XVI be launched in an appropriate manner, preferably in Bargoed Library.

With another interesting programme, a new venue, and growing membership the portents for 2007-08 look good – let's make sure it is!

#### **Launch of Gelligaer Volume XVI – Friday 22 June 2007.**

Bargoed Library hosted an extra-special gathering of Gelligaer Historical Society, to mark publication of Volume XVI of their Journal. In his introduction, Chairman, Mr. Terry McCarthy stated that the first volume of the Journal was published in 1964, since when they have appeared at irregular intervals. This is the biggest and, perhaps, best edition yet.

Performing the official launch was Member of Parliament for Caerphilly, Mr. Wayne David, himself a historian – he has recently published a biography of Ness Edwards long time M.P. for Caerphilly. Mr. David commended the Society on its achievement, notably the quality of articles, which covered a range topics of local interest. He emphasised the importance of history, especially local histories, for in our modern world of global communication through the internet etc., publications like this provide communities with roots. Indeed, he suggested that articles such as those in Volume XVI, exemplified 'organic history', emanating from within the community itself.

Having thanked all who made Volume XVI possible, thanks were extended to Mr. Steve King, Chief Librarian at Bargoed Library and his staff, for hosting the Society's meetings for the past 30 years. Sadly, with redevelopment of Bargoed Library planned in the very near future, the Society felt it needed a secure meetings base, so from September, meetings will be held at Llancaiach Fawr.

Plans for the History Conference being organised in conjunction with Chris Morgan and the C.C.B.C. Museum and Heritage Office were outlined. Scheduled for Saturday 29 September 2007, at Llancaiach Fawr, it is intended to be a gathering for those societies whose aims relate to study or conservation of the past in Caerphilly County Borough. Mr. Wayne David is to be one of several making presentations on historical themes during the day.

Thereafter, light refreshments were taken and members and guests were able to socialise.

#### **Volume XVI**

**Contents:** 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 Bedwellty 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. Cost £5. The task now is to sell as many as we can.

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

Index for Vols. I-XVI, available, September, £1. GHS does not own complete collection Journals, 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.

## Gelligaer Historical Society

### Society Officers 2007-08

President	Mr Islwyn Hughes
Chairman	Mr Terry McCarthy
Secretary	Mrs Jean Kember
Treasurer	Mrs Hazel Waters

**Membership - £6 per year – non members are welcome, but a contribution of £1 per lecture would be appreciated to defray expenses.**

### Meetings Scheduled for 2007-08.

2007	26 September	St. Cattwg's Church	Islwyn Hughes
	24 October	Pirates of the Bristol Channel	Alan Thorne
	28 November	Conservation	Verity Sidgwick
	13 December	Inca Way or Incapable Way?	Terry McCarthy
2008	27 February	Bedwellty	David Mills
	26 March	Sir Francis Drake, Part III	Tudor Fisher
	30 April	The Silures	Ray Howells
	28 May	The Management of the Gelligaer Estates in the 1600s.	Annie Owen
	25 June	A.G.M.	

### Conference - Saturday 29 September 2007 – Llancaiach Fawr

Progress so far: a number of speakers have been booked, including Prof. Bernard Knight (Madoc), Chris Morgan (C.C.B.C. Museum Project – Winding House), Leslie Shore (Powell Duffryn Co.) Wayne David M.P. (Morgan Jones M.P.), plus two of our own – Jean Kember (Tribal Princes of Senghenydd) and Terry McCarthy (40 Years of Photography in Rhymney Valley). Others are in the pipeline. A number of organisations have indicated a desire to have display stands, and/or a presentation on their own projects. Two paid delegate bookings have already been received, even before the publicity push starting in August!

The conference is scheduled to begin at 09.30 with registration, continuing until 16.00 – at which time there might be a special delegates tour around the house. Cost, including lunch and tea/coffee is £5 – tickets available from Terry McCarthy from mid August.

The response, to date, has been most encouraging and I hope the Society can gather itself together and make it an event to remember, hopefully to the point that it becomes a regular feature on the calendars of every society/group engaged in disseminating any aspect of historical knowledge to the community at large.

#### Grants etc.

Our Communities@One grant application has been successful and will lead to the establishment of a Society web site. The package includes training for up to six people to learn how to develop the web site, use and produce images from a digital camera (included in our bid) which can be added to our site, besides use of programs such as 'Publisher'. At present, the Chairman is seeking insurance cover for what will be a mobile office, a pre-requisite for accessing the funding.

Our success at securing funding to consider the possibilities for developing the Roman sites in Gelligaer has enabled the consultant to start work, on what could be an interesting project.

### Gwent Family History Society Research Trips 2007:

Saturday 8 September	Family Records Centre, London.
Saturday 20 October	National Archives, Kew

GHS Members welcome – details 01495 223995 or [trips@gwentfhs.info](mailto:trips@gwentfhs.info)

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