



# ***GELLIGAER TIMES***

## **NEWSLETTER OF GELLIGAER HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

Issue No. 51     January 2021

### **MESSAGE TO READERS OF GELLIGAER TIMES FROM GHS CHAIR**

In the absence of a newsletter editor, this newsletter, with

- **News items**
- **Supplement with items relating to local history and heritage**

has been prepared by GHS committee. I hope it has something to interest you, and, perhaps, some of you will respond with comments and/or questions, or even indicate that you would like to edit a future issue. If so, please contact [chairman@gelligaerhistoricalsociety.co.uk](mailto:chairman@gelligaerhistoricalsociety.co.uk) or [www.gelligaerhistoricalsociety.co.uk](http://www.gelligaerhistoricalsociety.co.uk)

### **NEWS**

At the time of writing, the most recent information on Llancaiach Fawr's website is:

#### **COVID 19 UPDATE 21/12/2020**

Due to the latest government announcement the Manor House, Gift Shop and Visitor Centre will remain **closed** until further notice.

Stay home, Stay Safe

You may like to keep up-to-date with the position in Llancaiach Fawr and with Welsh Government COVID 19 Regulations by checking their websites:

<https://your.caerphilly.gov.uk/llancaiachfawr/content/welcome-llancaiach-fawr> <https://gov.wales/coronavirus>

**ZOOM TALKS** – thank you to those people who responded to the request in *Gelligaer Times* 48, for opinion about GHS delivering talks via Zoom in place of the usual LFM meetings. Details of any such talks arranged will be circulated together with an invitation to join.

If you wish to make a **payment to GHS**, you can

- Post 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)

### **GHS DIAMOND JUBILEE PROJECT**

The majority of submissions for inclusion in the Society's publication about nineteenth century Gelligaer parish have been received and, currently, editing is taking place.

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.

### **THIS IS A TEXT OF A PETITION TO THE WELSH GOVERNMENT**

#### ***Call for fair funding for the National Library of Wales by the Welsh Government***

*We call for fair funding by the Welsh Government to the National Library of Wales, one of the world's great libraries, a repository of the historic, artistic and intellectual treasures of Wales. With no increased support from Welsh Government, 30 jobs are to be cut and services seriously curtailed. Freedom, prosperity and the development of society and individuals are fundamental human values, attained by well-informed citizens with unlimited access to thought, culture and information.*

*To ensure that the National Library of Wales continues with delivering comprehensive services to all, we ask the Welsh Government to increase its financial support, ensuring that it remains a gateway to knowledge, providing lifelong learning. Libraries cannot be expected to generate their own income in the same way as businesses.*

**Many GHS members, in common with countless others in Wales and across the world, value the excellent facilities provided by NLW, and are very concerned about the effects of any cuts on the future study of history and heritage.**

**To sign this petition, go to [Call for fair funding for the National Library of Wales by the Welsh Government - Petitions \(senedd.wales\)](https://www.senedd.wales/petitions)**

## GHS continues to receive a variety of **QUERIES RELATING TO THE HISTORY AND HERITAGE OF GELLIGAER PARISH AND NEIGHBOURING AREAS.**

Recent enquiries sought information about:

1. the fifteen WWI casualties named on Troedrhiwfwuch war memorial. If anyone can shed any light on those unidentified to date, please contact [chairman@gelligaerhistoricalsociety.co.uk](mailto:chairman@gelligaerhistoricalsociety.co.uk)
2. the history of the house adjacent to the present St. Gwladys School, Bargoed, and the people who have lived in it.

## NEWS ABOUT PUBLICATIONS THAT MAY INTEREST YOU

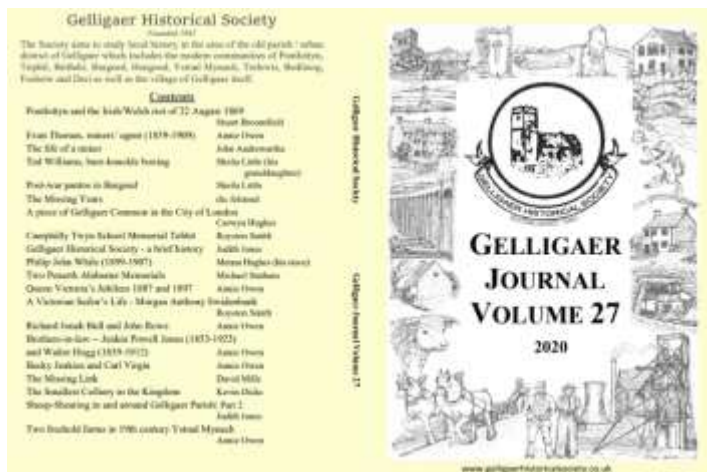
The cover of **GHS journal *Gelligaer* Volume 27** lists the varied and interesting articles in the volume. Copies are available via [www.gelligaerhistoricalsociety.co.uk](http://www.gelligaerhistoricalsociety.co.uk)

One amendment -- page 120, the sub-heading five lines from the bottom of the page, should read **The move to Church Farm, Mynyddislwyn**

If you would like to contribute to a future journal, please get in touch.

**GHS members (2019-20, and any new members 2020-21) who wish to have a copy posted to them, please send your postal address (including post code) to GHS website**

[www.gelligaerhistoricalsociety.co.uk](http://www.gelligaerhistoricalsociety.co.uk) or [chairman@gelligaerhistoricalsociety.co.uk](mailto:chairman@gelligaerhistoricalsociety.co.uk) In spite of the fact that we do not have our normal outlets (GHS meetings, local libraries and retailers), there has been considerable interest in the journal.



## REVIEW ARTICLE by Judith Jones

### Two Reverend Gentlemen from Bedwellty: Lewis James and Charles Winter, *Gwent Local History*, number 128 (Gwent Local History Council, 2020)

David Mills needs no introduction to G.H.S. members and to readers of *Gelligaer Times*. He has been a member of the Society since the early 1980s, held several offices, and edited both the journal and newsletter at various times; he has given talks to the G.H.S. and other societies and written several books and articles, including some for *Gelligaer*.

For his most recent article, David has returned to his first love: Bedwellty. Writing in *GWENT LOCAL HISTORY*, number 128, 2020, the journal of the Gwent Local History Council, he gives a fascinating background to religion in Bedwellty, and to some extent, neighbouring Gelligaer parish, during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. He does this by discussing the lives and the challenges to the (contrasting) religious beliefs of two Bedwellty men: Lewis James, curate at Bedwellty church, was challenged by Oliver Cromwell's Commonwealth government, while dissenter, Charles Winter, held views which were challenged by other non-conformists.

Lewis James, David writes, was well-educated and meticulous in his duties as a parish priest. David praised his record-keeping, for example, when James identified 82 people of the 109 he buried in 1638 as having died of plague. Following his removal from the living in 1650, James stayed in the parish, continuing to baptise children and keep parish records, although with no known income for himself or his family. David particularly applauded James, whose persistence in record-keeping during the Commonwealth has resulted in the preservation of "one of the most comprehensive set of church registers in Gwent".

David Mills then turned his attention to the life and works of Charles Winter, born 1700 to a well-off Bedwellty farmer. Winter was raised as a member of Bedwellty church but, as a young man, turned to Baptist beliefs as held by Hengoed Baptist chapel, and was baptised there (against his father's wishes), aged 24. He studied at Carmarthen before returning to Hengoed as assistant minister to his erstwhile mentor, Morgan Griffiths. David clearly explains the differences between the ideology disseminated by Winter whose controversial views favoured General Baptists (Armenianists) and by the Strict Baptists (Calvinists) at Hengoed. These differences resulted in vocal and volatile arguments, although Morgan Griffiths brokered a peace and Winter continued as his assistant. Eventually, however, David tells us, Charles Winter was excommunicated by the Hengoed chapel elders. Subsequently, he and a similarly-minded group of adherents met at sympathisers' houses before establishing themselves at Zion Chapel which they built in an isolated spot in Nant y Garth valley, near Bedlinog. Charles Winter continued to live a two-hour journey away at his family home, Ty Newydd farm, Bedwellty but still ministered to his flock at

Zion. Unusually, a commemoration stone to Charles and his brother, William Winter, is on the wall at Bedwelty Church.

We have come to expect extensive research, accurate recording and a very readable style from David Mills. This article certainly lives up to our expectations!

And, for reference, this is a list of David's previously-published work:

Books:

*Bedwelty Revisited* (Stow 2011)

*The Williams Family of Maesruddud* (Park Mile Publications, Cefn Forest, 2013)

*William Foster Geach* (Gelligaer Publishing, 2015) [NOTE this work was referenced in *Rachel Herbert: The extraordinary story of a Benefactor, a deceitful solicitor and the Chartists* in *Gwent Local History*, number 128 (Gwent Local History Council, 2020)

*William Davies* (2018)

Articles

A Murderer Visits Gelligaer, *Gelligaer*, vol. xiv (2004)

The Norman Church; not just at Gelligaer, *Gelligaer*, vol. xvi (2007)

The Most Important Part of a Will, *Gelligaer*, vol. xvii (2009)

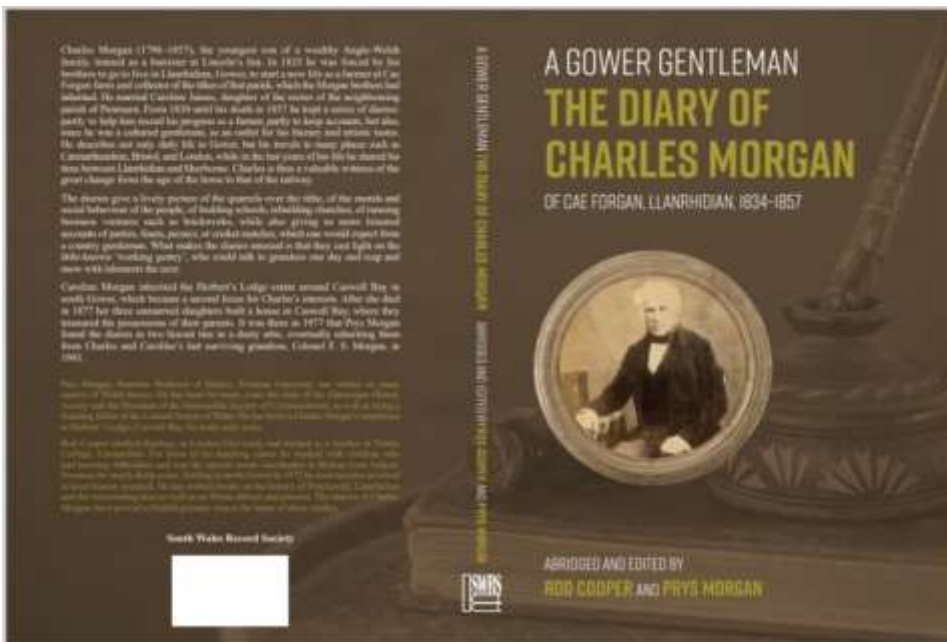
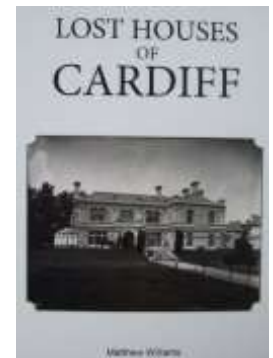
Charles Winter, *Gelligaer*, vol. 20 (2013)

Bedwelty Church Roll of Honour, *Gelligaer*, vol. 23 (2016)

WWI Memorials at the Parish Church of St. Sannan, Bedwelty, *Gelligaer*, vol. 23 (2016)

Two Reverend Gentlemen from Bedwelty: Lewis James and Charles Winter, *Gwent Local History*, number 128 (Gwent Local History Council, 2020)

Matthew Williams's recent book *Lost Houses of Cardiff* is available from [Lost Houses of Cardiff | eBay](#)



South Wales Record Society will shortly publish *A Gower Gentleman The Diary of Charles Morgan of Cae Forgan, Llanrhidian, 1834-1857*. For further details see [South Wales Record Society](#)



## GELLIGAER AT THE TIME OF LLEWELYN BREN

On a cold morning in January 2020, a number of GHS members were among a sizeable crowd gathered (do readers remember how we gathered in pre-socially-distanced times?) on Gelligaer's village square for the unveiling of a memorial to Llewelyn Bren. The reconstruction drawing of the area some seven hundred years ago was the work of Chris Jones-Jenkins, who, when he lived in the area, was a member of GHS and served as its treasurer in the 1990s. The original drawing is framed for display in the surgery alongside the square in Gelligaer, and a framed high-quality copy will go in the parish church, across the road from the square.

For further information on Llewelyn Bren see *Remembering Llewelyn Bren* by GHS member, Dr. Stuart Broomfield, in *Gelligaer* journal volume 26 (2019).



Modern technology allows the drawing created by Chris Jones-Jenkins to be converted into an online jigsaw which he has done - some GHS readers may like to attempt it.

Click on the link or copy the link to your browser to try this jigsaw

<https://www.jigsawexplorer.com/online-jigsaw-puzzle-player.html?url=aHR0cHM6Ly9pbWd1ci5jb2vcTJKenBRNS5qcGc~&nop=100&color=yellow>

or go to

<https://www.jigsawexplorer.com>.

Where there are many other jigsaws to be done – you can even setup your own pictures as a jigsaw

Let us know if you do this!.

# SUPPLEMENT TO NEWSLETTER 51

## HOREB BAPTIST CHAPEL, GELLIGAER

These photographs showing the interior of Horeb Baptist Chapel, Gelligaer, are scanned copies taken from the original glass slides of David Blatchford by GHS member, David Mills. GHS will be pleased to hear from readers able to name any of the people shown in the photographs as well as any memories of attending services or other events there.



## STEAM TRAIN AT CWMBARGOED



Many readers of *Gelligaer Times* will remember the age of the steam locomotive. This picture of a 2014 postage stamp shows BR 5600 No. 5652 heading a coal train at Cwmbargoed, Merthyr Tydfil, 1959, on the Bargoed Taf railway line, with original Taylor Woodrow opencast coal site in background.

For 2014 Classic Locomotives series of postage stamps, see <http://www.collectgbstamps.co.uk/explore/issues/?issue=22701>

For about a hundred years, from the third quarter of the nineteenth century, railways in and near Gelligaer parish not only offered excellent goods and passenger links locally but also connected the area to the national rail network. The importance of the railways in the development of the local coal industry is patently clear to GHS members and friends currently researching the nineteenth century history of the parish. At the opening of the nineteenth century, goods were transported by trains of packhorses, as shown in this model, and described in *Merthyr Tydfil A* (1981) as *a slow, expensive and inefficient journey to the roads little changed for seventeen hundred years*. While animals conveyed small quantities of heavy distances, or larger amounts of lighter products, wool or horse hair, for longer distances, they the demands of the local area's coal mining the mid-nineteenth century onwards. Without the steam locomotives to link the area to the ports, the local coal industry would not have developed.



*Valley community coast ... along trains of pack goods for short such as sheep's could not meet economy from the railways and Bristol Channel*

Much has been written about the railways and the steam locomotives, and readers interested in the local picture are referred to Terry McCarthy's fine contribution to GHS WWI project in *Gelligaer* vol. 21 (2014), and, in particular, the map on page 148.



## HOW TO SPOT OLD COAL WORKINGS

David Mills

Many readers will be familiar with the colliery waste tips that once dominated the landscapes of the south Wales mining valleys. Over the years many of them have been removed or landscaped so that their visual links to the coal industry are now few and far between. It would be interesting to find out how many under 30-year-olds have any idea of what a coal tip looks like. This photograph, taken from Aberbargoed, shows the landscaped coal tip above Brithdir on the skyline. It is not as intrusive as formerly when it was much higher. However, if you know where to look it is a reminder of the past.

In the absence of coal tips this brief article hopefully demonstrates how it is possible to pin-point some old workings on the surface. Consulting old maps is, of course, the starting point but in my view the fun comes after that when visiting some known sites to look for clues.

Below is a photo taken from Tesco car park, Ystrad Mynach. On the skyline is the coal tip above Llanbradach which is one of the very few in the area that has not been landscaped in any way.

One way of establishing that coal had been extracted is to find a stream that erupts from the defunct mines. If coal had been struck, then oftentimes the stream is discoloured; this is not an absolute guarantee but is certainly a good



indicator. The photographs below were taken by G.H.S. member Sandy Halliday. The stream is below the disused Carn Gethin colliery, Cefn Hengoed and can easily be seen when walking along a path that starts in Cefn Hengoed and goes downhill, underneath the railway line and ends up at the rear of the houses in Woodland Terrace, Tiryberth. The path is known locally as the “black path”. Sandy Halliday found a useful reference on the Coal Authority website which explains the causes of the discolouration and remedies to help reduce the pollution. Anyone interested can find out more on that website. However, a brief explanation is that the colour is the mineral iron leeching into the water.

To the west of the railway



To the east-towards Tiryberth







The photograph (left) shows the path after it emerges from the railway bridge; in fact, it is on the line of the old tramroad that ran from Carn Gethin Colliery to the Rhymney river at Pengam.

Another example of a “red” stream is to be found near the former Tophill Colliery, between Gelligaer and Llancaiach Fawr



Not all coal workings cause this problem. The photographs below are reproduced courtesy of Lyn Pask. They show an old trial level on farmland near the old isolation hospital at the north of Hospital Road, Penpedairheol. In this case it is likely that coal was not found

so no iron was disturbed, hence the clear water.



The next photograph shows a metal door, which in a sense is not an unusual feature. However, the door is the entrance/exit to an old colliery shaft at New Tredegar. It was known as White Rose. I am reliably informed that at the top of the steps ( I did not climb them ! ) are stones where the colliery shaft exists. It is now capped off, but a local story is that a postman sat on the stones and fell part way into the shaft-he was not hurt. After heavy rainfall water pours out from beneath the iron door

David Mills thanks Sandy Halliday and Lyn Pask for their help with this article.

**Any readers of *Gelligaer Times* who have photographs (including those taken during daily exercise walks/cycle-rides during lockdown) connected with Gelligaer parish’s coal heritage, are invited to send them to [www.gelligaerhistoricalsociety.co.uk](http://www.gelligaerhistoricalsociety.co.uk) or [chairman@gelligaerhistoricalsociety.co.uk](mailto:chairman@gelligaerhistoricalsociety.co.uk) for inclusion in a future newsletter.**



## GLOSSARY OF LOCAL COAL MINING OCCUPATIONS

GHS member, Carwyn Hughes, writes *Having examined the Bedlinog census records I was surprised to find such a wide variety of occupations at the Bedlinog and Nantwen Collieries. Society members are probably familiar with some of them if they had any relatives in the coalmining industry.*

Carwyn's list, reproduced below, may prove especially interesting to members of the younger generation who will not have experienced the day-to-day close contact with an industry that was central to the lives of several generations of local people. GHS will be pleased to hear from any *Gelligaer Times* readers able to add to this glossary, with terms used in different eras and in different parts of the country.

**Banksman** : Person at the pithead responsible for loading and unloading men and coal drams from the cage. In addition, he would signal when the cage was ready for descent.

**Blacksmith** : Repaired, and also made some equipment to order.

**Boiler flue cleaner** : Basically, an industrial chimney sweep since coal was burned in the furnaces to produce heat and then steam to drive the machinery. As electricity became the power source such an occupation was no longer required.

**Boiler stoker**: Filled the furnaces with coal.

**Collier boy** : An apprentice collier (coal miner), sometimes from as young as fourteen or even younger. Usually, he would commence work alongside an experienced miner for on-the-job training. Often the adult would receive payment which he would share with 'his boy'. Sometimes a boy would be employed to open a brattice door to improve ventilation or to allow drams to pass through. This could result in the youngster being alone in darkness for a long period of time.

A brattice door was usually a construction of a wooden frame covered by a fabric impregnated with coal tar. [There used to be a company making these sheets located near the Newport Rodney Parade rugby ground].

**Electrician** : Responsible for the installation and maintenance of electrical circuitry above and below ground.

**Engine Haulage Engineer** : The installation and maintenance engineer for static engines used for hauling the drams underground.

**Fan engineman** : Operated a large fan which was installed to drive air down a shaft to improve air circulation and reduce the build up of potential explosive gases. The up shaft was basically the exhaust shaft. Initially, in mines a single shaft was sunk to save money, and a brattice curtain used to subdivide the shaft. This became an illegal practice and was banned.

**Fireman** : An important occupation because he was entrusted with mine safety. He measured the volumes of coal dust and Methane gas underground. On his order, mining activity would cease and ventilation increased to prevent a potential explosive mixture of gas and coal dust. Each shift would have a fireman. A miner could transfer to this occupation but would require further training and certification (as illustrated right).

**Fitter** : General mechanic.

**Haulier** : Responsible for pit ponies. A large colliery might have two, one above and one below ground.

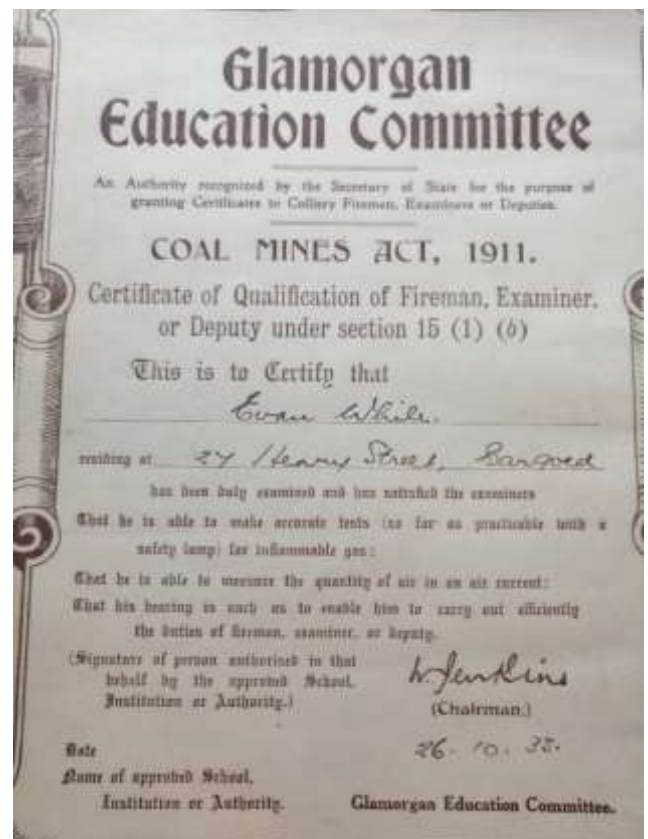
**Horse inspector** : Would also be the above named occupation. He was responsible for the welfare of the pit ponies, looked after them if injured or ill; also when they required shoeing, etc.

**Hewer**: Collier, Miner

**Hitcher** : Operated at the pit bottom, loading and unloading men; coal; materials and machinery from the cage.

**Labourer** : As in other industries he would be given the unskilled jobs.

**Lampman** : Depending on the size of the colliery there might be a number of men working in the lamp room. The first job was to ensure individual lamps operated efficiently and safely. Lamps would be powered by batteries which required charging before the next shift. In some collieries Calcium Carbide was used. This chemical when in contact with water produced the gas Acetylene which was ignited for illumination. Nowadays, some cavers might use this type of lamp.







A miner was given a numbered, metal disc called a check (as illustrated by this lamp check from Taff Merthyr Colliery) which he exchanged for his lamp when beginning his shift. Later at the end of his shift, on returning safely the miner handed over his lamp and collected his check. If a lamp was not returned, there would be a gap on that rack and the absent miner could be readily identified by the numbered check still in its place. It was a means of identifying miners in case of an accident underground.

**Manager** : Responsible for the general operation of the colliery. He might have trained

professionally as a mining engineer. Working beneath him would be three under-managers, one for each operating shift i.e. day, afternoon and night.

**Miner** : Could also be called a coal miner, hewer, collier. A miner worked at the coal face. Payment of wages was based on the amount of coal extracted by the said miner or he could be on a fixed sum.

If the former, then the **Overman** would measure how much of a coal seam had been extracted. He would leave marks cut into timber props etc and measure from the last mark. The calculation of the coal; extracted was in cubic yards, feet and inches. On average, a cubic yard of coal weighs one ton, so the weight of coal mined, multiplied by the rate of money per ton, thus the miner's wage was determined.

A '**stent**' was a delineated area where an individual miner worked. In difficult areas of loose rock, the miner might spend a lot of worktime ensuring his 'stent' was safe and his pay would suffer, as a result of this. Similarly, if the coal seam was of anthracite, (which is harder than bituminous coal to extract) then a greater effort was required to produce the same wage.

**Mine examiner** : Increasingly over time coal mining became a safer occupation. Explosions, roof falls, injuries to miners and others reduced coal production and it became necessary to improve the conditions at work. The Examiner might also be a mining engineer and would ensure headings required enlargement; strata control where suitable supports were needed, etc. Sometimes this work was delegated to under managers, firemen and overmen.

**Overman** : Already shown how this person could calculate the wages of miners by measuring the amount of coal individuals extracted. He also examined the quality of the coal and saw that it did not carry large amounts of shale or slag. His was the occupation to ensure 'clean coal'.

**Ostler** : Responsible for the pit ponies below ground. Like other occupations there were loose boundaries in the definitions. There were stables below ground near the pit bottom where food, water, rest and grooming of the animals took place. Injured or ill ponies would be taken to the surface for more equine treatment.

**Plate layer** : Drams were relatively small railway trucks and ran on railways from the coalface to the pit bottom. Platelayers were responsible for the tracks which necessitated maintenance and moving, as coal seams were extracted.

**Pumpman** : Ground water had to be removed from the pit. Usually, the shaft was over deepened to produce a sump into which water was drained. A large pump then transferred the collected water up the shaft and away from the colliery. From our own experiences nowadays, we have seen rivers running with clear water and not black, as in former coal producing times.

**Repairer** : Whereas a coal miner is concerned with coal removal he also ensures that he works safely in his 'stent'. His pay depends on the amount of coal he can extract. A repairer followed on during another shift or shifts, to ensure that a coal face is made safe and ready for the next coal producing session. Normally there would be a single coaling shift and it was usually the day shift. The afternoon and night shifts would see the repairers in operation. Additionally, they may be required to enlarge or repair headings. Sometimes roof supports had been squeezed by the earth movement, or the metal supports had become contorted, and the repairer would be required to make such areas safer.

**Rider** : Would shackle drams together to make a journey of 20/25 drams and would ride on the journey to pit bottom. He returned in the same fashion with empty drams which would be unshackled for individual miners to use. Sometime injuries and fatalities occurred as in the case of Phillip While an 18 year old rider killed in Bargoed Colliery in 1907 (see Gelligaer vol. 27 2020 page 57). In that year there were over 300 fatalities in Welsh collieries.

**Ripper** : Employed with repairers, and would rip out loose ceilings or where holes had appeared so that there was a new surface to be supported.

**Sawyer** : Operated the saw mill cutting timber to required lengths for above and below ground use.

**Shaft examiner** : Both shafts in a colliery needed to be in good working order. Damage to either or both would reduce the capacity to extract coal. The shafts were the main links between the surface and the underground workings. There could also be a small safety shaft, for emergencies only.

The cages had to operate efficiently and safely both for the transport of men, machinery and coal. Since the shafts were the main conduits, they were also used for communications, air for ventilation and water extraction.

**Sinker** : Normally teams of men were employed to dig the shafts and/or to extend them so that economically viable deeper seams of coal could be extracted. The South Wales Coalfield is a geological basin, so the Brithdir coal seam near Dowlais, was close to the surface but in Bedlinog it was 150 feet below the surface.

The Bedlinog Colliery shafts were 573 yards deep, taking 3 years to be excavated.

Taff Merthyr Colliery shafts were 635 yards deep, taking 3 years to be excavated.

Bargoed Colliery 705 yards deep, taking 4 years to be excavated.

Clearly, sinkers were employed early in the history of a colliery and in some mines, as stated above, it took years to complete the extraction.

By today's standards some of the accommodation for the sinkers could be described as rudimentary. One street in Treharris where the sinkers were initially housed later became known as 'the Huts'.

As the shafts were sunk, drawings of geological sections were made and indication of the depths and various thicknesses of the strata were illustrated. The website of the British Geological Survey has such information available.

**Shot firer or Shotman** : Where large coal seams or hard coal seams existed, controlled explosions might have been necessary to loosen the coal. Holes were drilled into a coal seam, and small charges of explosive inserted, then ignited. Similarly, where headings needed to be extended, the same principle was employed in the absence of a boring machine.

**Timberman** : When a coal seam was extracted, the strata above it required support. Depending on the thickness of the seam, different lengths and thicknesses of timber were required. Timber by its very nature would be quickly cut to the appropriate sizes by the miners or repairers. The timbermen supplied them with timber from their stores.

**Tipper** : In the early days of coal mining, women were often employed as tippers. Their job was to tip a dram containing coal into an unloading area or onto a screen where any shale or non-coal rock would be removed.

**Winder or Winding Engine Man** : Operated the machine that hauled the cages to the surface. The Winding House Museum at New Tredegar has an excellent example of such a machine and the operator's seat and signalling system is clearly seen.

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## EXCHANGE TEACHER PROGRAM – SWAPPING LIVES FOR A YEAR

Researched by Roy Smith

A teacher exchange scheme allows qualified teachers to swap places with teachers in other countries, typically for a semester/year, giving them the perfect opportunity to share ideas and knowledge, as well as learn about educational practices from different countries. It is also a wonderful way to truly appreciate the meaning of the phrase, *walking a mile in someone else's shoes!*



GWLADYS COWLES



MARY GENTRY



Miss Gwladys Cowles did just that when she arrived in the United States in August 1948, on a teacher exchange organized by the National Educational Association. Miss Cowles, headmistress of Bargoed Girls' Secondary Modern School, exchanged places with Mary Jane Gentry of San Angelo Junior High School, Texas. About 112 British exchange teachers (number changes according to which newspaper is read) started with a four-day visit to Washington that culminated in a White House reception hosted, in the absence of the Trumans, by Mrs George Marshall, wife of the Secretary of State, before they dispersed to American schools in thirty states.

It would appear from the following newspaper articles that Gwladys Cowles did her fair share of public speaking while in U.S.A.. These extracts show how her talks were reported in the press on that side of the Atlantic.

The ***Dallas Morning News* 21 November 1948** revealed Miss Gwladys Cowles from Wales would contrast English teaching methods with American at a dinner of the Texas Classroom Teachers Association at the Baker Hotel, Dallas on Friday 26 November.

***Amarillo Daily News* 13 December 1948** - "How Are Things in Bargoed? Listen" by Frederick Tripp who reported this:

"A gracious and knowledgeable representative from Cambria was in Amarillo yesterday to visit her friends and to make known – in beautifully fluent English – just how things are getting on in her part of the world. She castigated Winston Churchill and the British Empire in winged word, praised the present Labour government in England, explained the difference between our school system and that prevailing in her homeland, and then spun a hair-raising comparison between prices there and here".

For Miss Gwladys Cowles, of the town of Bargoed, near Cardiff, Wales, is a teacher of history. The general impression is that she does not need a book to teach her subject. At Bargoed, the visitor explained, she is principal of a secondary school for girls.

Then, turning temporarily from shop-talk to politics, she attacked past English policy in Wales with a quiet emphasis. "There was a time," she said, "when South Wales was so densely forested that it was said a squirrel could go from Cardiff to the Severn without touching the ground. "Those great forests now are gone – chopped down by the English mine-owners to bolster their mine holdings."

Miss Cowles paused in this discourse briefly to explain that Wales, the tiny former independent kingdom in the southwest corner of England, has been an integral part of the United Kingdom since the days of Edward 1, when it was conquered by the English. Until recently therefore, the attitude of the English towards Welsh has been tinged by the faint air of condescension affected by the conquerors toward the conquered.

Then it was discovered that South Wales is something like the coalfields of Pennsylvania. Absentee English owners opened the pits, exploited the coal seams with cheap Welsh labour and turned the lovely valleys into enormous slag heaps. In the North, Welshmen eked out a living by a sparse agricultural economy.

"In short," Miss Cowles explained, "the general feeling in Wales is that the policy of the English has been one of repression, although Wales now has full representation in the Parliament." Miss Cowles said the present Labour government has been hailed throughout the country and particularly in the coal mining districts. Conditions there are much improved – "although," she said, "we could use that Welshman, John L. Lewis."

The speaker said many Welsh mines are on the point of being abandoned, "though the operators now must continue operation because coal is in such short supply." She described the Welsh mining equipment as antiquated and said miners in some instances must crawl through abandoned shafts to reach the seam they are working, instead of descending through a new pit-head opened directly over the seam.

"And such," she said "is our basic economy. We therefore feel that we have been mistreated in the past by the deliberate English suppression of a more balanced economy." But since the Labourites have assumed control of the government, things are "much better," she asserted. Government is introducing light industry into the hills and valleys in an effort to avert the terrible sufferings of the depression that lasted – in Wales – "from 1921 to the beginning of World War II."

During those days, Miss Cowles said, "the dole - otherwise known as unemployment insurance - was a maximum of 66 cents per month for the child of each unemployed man. There were three-fourths of a million unemployed in Wales alone," she said.

Turning to present prices and income, Miss Cowles said she owns a nine-room house in Cardiff, for which she normally receives a weekly rent of two pounds, or approximately \$8. "Therefore," she said, "when I tell you that my present salary in Wales is about \$2,700 annually, you must not assume that I am starving. The only difficulty

## Society Hears Guest Talk

Miss Gladys Cowles, Welsh exchange teacher in San Angelo High School, addressed Delta Kappa Gamma, national honorary society for women teachers, at the recent meeting in the high school cafeteria.

The guest is principal of a girls' secondary modern school in Bargoed, Wales. Last year she was elected president of the National Association of Head Teachers of the Welsh Federation. Miss Cowles explained the educational system in her homeland, where children are given competitive examinations at the age of 11, after which they are placed in secondary grammar school, technical school or modern school.

The Amarillo Globe-Times  
14 Dec 1948

is in finding something to buy. Everything – food, clothing and fuel – is strictly rationed. Just how strictly, she explained, may be illustrated by the ration allowance of one egg per month, six ounces of meat per week and one ounce of lard per week.

But care of youngsters and children bears comparison with the American system. Each school child receives one pint of milk per day, without cost, and free orange juice and cod liver oil are crammed daily into the “nursery” schoolchildren, also without cost. For the older children, five excellent meals per week are available at the equivalent of 25 cents per meal.

For much of this, she explained Welshmen are indebted to Aneurin Bevan, present minister of health in the British cabinet. “He is Churchill’s greatest enemy,” Miss Cowles explained. “They are at cross purposes most of the time and Mr. Bevan has a trick of puncturing the Churchill eloquence.” The visitor was about to explain how the Welsh Delegation nevertheless was responsible for the choice of Churchill as war-time prime minister when other guests began to arrive. So, she turned instead to an informative description of the Eisteddfod Genedlaethol, which to you, friends, means merely the National Festival of the Arts, as any old Welshman will tell you.”

Gwladys Cowles was guest speaker at the baccalaureate service for the 51 members of the Anson High School senior class held 22 May 1949 in the high school auditorium. (*Abilene Reporter-News (Texas)* 21 May 1949.

Benjamin, Gwendolyn, Lily May and Roland, siblings of Gwladys’s mother (Anna), had migrated to America, and so the exchange visit gave Gwladys the opportunity to visit family relations. In June 1949, she travelled to Wilmington to meet her cousin Dorothy, daughter of Lily May (Pritchard). Her visit coincided with the monthly meeting of Gulf Avenue Parent-Teacher Association when Dorothy (Mrs Gerald Mulligan) was inducted as first vice president. Dorothy ensured Gwladys was invited to the event and introduced her to the assembly.

**ANSON—Miss Gladys Cowles, school teacher from Wales, will give a lecture in the Anson Woman's Club at 4 p. m. Friday, April 15. She is principal of a Modern Secondary Girls' school in Wales and for the past year has been teaching in San Angelo.**

The Hamlin Herald (Texas)  
15 April 1949



Gwladys travelled to and from America on SS Britannic, which embarked Liverpool 13 August 1948 and reached New York on 21 August. On the return voyage, she departed New York on 11 August 1949, bound for Liverpool.

Returning home, Mary Gentry travelled on the White Star liner Queen Elizabeth, embarked Southampton on 13 August 1949. (The two ships passing each other somewhere in the Atlantic).

This photograph of the Bargoed North Secondary Modern School choir in 1950, is reproduced courtesy Paul James . GHS will be pleased to hear from any of these girls (or their families), especially if they have any memories of Miss Cowles or Miss Gentry, and what they might have told the pupils in Bargoed about U.S.A..



Readers may recall that the Miss Cowles and Miss Gentry were mentioned in 📖 SOMETHING YEARS OF GELLIGAER N.U.T. in *Gelligaer Times* 50 (December 2020)

188. A choir at Bargoed North Secondary Modern School in 1950. Seated centre are Miss Cowles (Head) and fellow teacher Mrs. Mair Williams. Some of the girls are - Rita Harris, Roslyn Harris, Valmai Wheeler, Enid Jones, Pamela Walker, Rita Goode, Jean Hodgkins, Rita Pritchard, Melita Davins, Janet Frowen, Valorie Lloyd, Iris Williams, Gwynys Colos, Cynthia Potter, Jean Howard, Jean Crane, Maureen Powell, Shirley Clapham, Mary Davies, Daphne Toone, Pamela Harris, Sheila Benfield, Shirley Smallman, Marina Phillips, Betty Davies, Joyce Lawie, Margaret Cross, Eileen Potts, Jean Bidgway, Thelma Davies, Shirley Morgan, Darvon Pritchard, Mary Lacey, Gwyneth Evans, Margueret Woods and Shirley Price.



As far as I can ascertain, there was just one other teacher from Wales on the scheme at the same time as Gwladys Cowles. That was Miss Nancy Enid Whitcombe, Griffithstown Mixed School, Pontypool, who exchanged with Pauline Tidwell of the Cleburne Junior High School, Texas. Pauline Tidwell not only taught American history and geography in various schools in the Pontypool area but also toured Belgium, Luxembourg and Holland. Nancy Whitcombe probably enjoyed her year in Texas as she emigrated there in 1955.




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### FLY ON THE WALL

This is based on reports in *Weekly Mail* 9 August 1902, page 11 and *Cardiff Times* 9 August 1902 page 7.

I am a rather nosy fly who has spent some time this year (1902) buzzing around a few people in Deri in the hope of getting to the truth about some alleged misconduct.

The first I heard of it was on 2 February when Isaac Morgan Davies (an insurance agent) met Edward Jones Jenkins (colliery checkweigher) coming out of Nazareth Congregational schoolroom, and invited him to his house for tea as he had something important to say to him and to John Parry Evans (a tailor). That made my antennae stir, so I followed, and this is what I heard:-

Isaac Morgan Davies: *Rev. Richards has been bad with my wife.* [Rev. William Bowen Richards was minister of Nazareth Congregational chapel, Deri, and, having failed to find accommodation in Deri, was lodging in the house of Isaac Morgan Davies, paying 4 shillings a week for a sitting room and a bedroom.]

John Parry Evans: *Has Rev. Richards done anything besides catching hold of her?*

Isaac Morgan Davies: *Yes. He was bad with her the first time he caught hold of her, and afterwards.*

John Parry Evans (to Margaret Davies, wife to Isaac Morgan Davies, they had married in 1899): *Is this true, Maggie?*  
 Margaret Davies mumbled a reply.

Isaac Morgan Davies: *Rev. Richards is not a fit and proper person to preach, and it would be better to give him a month's notice or pay him a month's wages, and let him go about his business.*

Edward Jones Jenkins: *Can you prove what you have said?*

Isaac Morgan Davies: *Yes; my wife's word is as good as Rev. Richards's. Rev. Richards misconducted himself with my wife when she went to his study with the dinner things last Wednesday.*

John Parry Evans: *Why didn't she drop the things and make a noise?*

Isaac Morgan Davies: *She was too weak.*

As I said, I am a nosy fly, and enjoy a bit of gossip. Well, can you blame me, the life of a fly can get very boring. So I made sure I was hanging around for the chapel meeting on Sunday 4 February when they decided that Rev. Richards should not preach that evening, and on the evening of 24 February 1902, when they held a meeting in the chapel. On the 24<sup>th</sup>, I recognised the following at the meeting:-

Rev. James Jones, Carmel Chapel, Fochriw, who is presiding over the meeting.

The two men who are appointed as secretaries:-

Edward Jones Jenkins, a deacon of this chapel.

Rees D. Jenkins, a preacher at Carmel Chapel, Fochriw who was invited by deacon John Parry Evans, to attend and take notes.

And Isaac Morgan Davies and his wife, Margaret.

While I stayed quietly on the window for an hour or so, I heard the following:

Margaret Davies: *Rev. Richards misconducted himself with me behind the study door when I was fetching the dinner things.*

Chapel deacon: *Is there anything in the story about insuring for £100, and, if Rev. Richards would not insure, your husband would raise 8s. a week on the lodgings, or do something to endanger Rev. Richards's position in Deri?*

Margaret Davies: *Isaac has been saying in sport about putting on 8s. a week or give him notice if he did not insure, but nothing about the other.*

Chapel deacon: *Can you tell us what happened?*

Margaret Davies: *Rev. Richards had intimacy with me a couple of times, and I did not complain as I thought everything was all right as long as Isaac knew about it. I was too weak to scream and throw the things on the floor, and call someone. I told Isaac what happened, and he was not in a bad temper when I told him.*

Rev. J. Jones of Fochriw: *What did Rev. Richards tell you when he caught hold of you?*

Margaret Davies: *Nothing, not a single word, but I told him to let me alone.*

Chapel deacon: *What can you tell us about this, Isaac? Did you speak to Rev. Richards about an insurance policy?*

Isaac Morgan Davies: *Yes. I had a talk with Rev. Richards about an insurance policy. My wife twice complained to me about him but I allowed him to remain in my house for some days because I didn't know what to do or where he would go.*

At this point, I noticed the secretaries write that Isaac Morgan Davies laughed.

Edward Jones Jenkins: *Isaac and Maggie, you have made a mistake: Rev. Richards was away at the times when you claim the misconduct.*

After all these questions, the meeting adopted a resolution:

*That this meeting is of the unanimous opinion that the accusation brought against the Rev. W. B. Richards by Isaac Davies and his wife is entirely wrong.*

That was not the end of things: as Isaac and Margaret Davies continued to repeat the allegations, Rev. Richards sued Isaac and Margaret Davies for £500 for alleged slander.

So, as I wanted to know even more, on Monday, 4 August 1902, I flew all the way to the Nisi Prius Court of Glamorganshire Assizes where (before Mr. Justice Jelf and a special jury) the action opened.

First, I heard the case for Rev. Richards (the plaintiff) put by his barrister, Samuel Thomas Evans, K.C., M.P.:

*This is a painful and serious case. The allegations against this 31-year-old who has been minister of Nazareth Congregational chapel, Deri, for eighteen months, did not start until after the dispute between him and Isaac Morgan Davies about an insurance policy. The allegations were that, on three occasions, Rev. Richards behaved indecently towards Margaret Davies, and committed adultery with her.*

After that statement, Edward Jones Jenkins was called as a witness. The minutes of the chapel meeting of 24 February were read to the court before Benjamin Francis-Williams, K.C.(acting for the defendants) questioned Edward Jones Jenkins who told the court about that meeting and about the plaintiff and the defendants:

*Rev. Richards does not receive any salary at all, just wages from what the church makes, and that varies according to circumstances. I have been a deacon at Nazareth for 22 years and I know that he has been paid thirty shillings a month, sometimes; sometimes £6. Nothing like the £75 a year that you suggest.*

*I wrote in the minutes of the chapel meeting that Isaac laughed because it was like his laugh – several laughed. I filled in a lot of the minutes of that chapel meeting afterwards from memory, and I was slow in replying to your request for the minutes for two reasons: not only was I suffering because I had been on strike for ten months, but also, I was disappointed by the way that Isaac Davies behaved towards Nazareth chapel, we deacons, and the congregation, since that chapel meeting.*

At this point, the Court adjourned for luncheon, and, when they resumed, Edward Jones Jenkins answered questions from Samuel Thomas Evans K.C., M.P. thus:

*Margaret Davies was fairly treated at the chapel meeting on 24 February, and her manner was the same as usual. I have known her from childhood. I nursed her when she was in long clothes [i.e. an infant]; she was in my Sunday school class for many years, and was always one of my best scholars. I am anxious that justice should be done to both parties. The chapel meeting resolution was not passed on condition that Rev. Richards should take steps to clear his character.*

After that, Rees D. Jenkins gave evidence about the chapel meeting of 24 February and the case for the plaintiff closed, and Benjamin Francis-Williams, K.C. opened the case for the defendants thus:

*I am surprised that the plaintiff has not been called to the witness-box. The suggestion that the accusations were the outcome of the insurance dispute is not worth considering. Rev. Williams was in arrears with his lodging rent, and it is difficult to see how he could pay the premiums on the policy out of his income.*



In answer to various questions put to her, Margaret Davies told the court:

*Isaac was not at home when Rev. Richards misconducted himself with me on 18 December. I took coal to his room, and he got hold of my arm. I resisted but he was too strong. He said "Oh, it's all right." His misconduct was against my will. When Isaac came home, I asked him to give Rev. Richards notice.*

*I was on the kitchen preparing his dinner when, on 22 January, he came out for the bellows and pushed me into the chair, and again misconducted himself.*

*I begged him to leave me alone, but the same thing occurred on 29 January, and when Isaac came home in the evening, I was crying. Later that evening, I told Isaac of Rev. Richards's conduct. I had not told Isaac before because he has a quick temper, and I am afraid of him. I did not hear Isaac accuse Rev. Richards.*

*Isaac lived with me until he left me on 10 March.*

*I told the chapel meeting that Rev. Richards did not misbehave himself until after he had notice to leave the house, because I was taken by surprise at their question, and I thought it better not to tell them all. I was asked so many questions and they twisted me about until I did not know what to say.*

Mr. Justice Jelf: *Why did you tell a lie? Why didn't you speak the truth? Did you think it better to tell a lie than the truth?*

Margaret Davies: *No, sir.*

Mr. Justice Jelf: *Then why did you tell a lie? Can you give us any reason? Can't you – won't you tell us? Very well, I leave it there.*

Margaret Davies continued:

*Rev. Richards promised an insurance case, but in spite of Isaac's persuasion he did not keep his promise. In the minutes of the chapel meeting, things were attributed to me that I did not say. I often told my mother that I wished Rev. Richards would go away, as we were suspicious of him. It is not true that I told the chapel meeting that I had no fear because Isaac knew Rev. Richards had been bad with me.*

The court adjourned at the end of the day, so I had to settle down in a dark corner until proceedings resumed the following day, when I heard Margaret Davies answer the questions of Samuel Thomas Evans K.C., M.P. thus:

*I lived on good terms with my husband until I told him on 29 January of Rev. Richards's conduct, but he didn't leave me until 10 March. Since then, I have lived with my mother. The case started before Isaac and I separated.*

*I did not make an agreement with Isaac for us to live apart so that we might be able to tell the Court of that. Isaac and I have not seen each other since 10 March. It is true that Isaac told Mrs Tovey "I have only left Maggie till the Assizes to see if I win the case, and then I will live with her as before." I was not having dinner with Isaac at Cardiff last Friday. I saw him, but not to speak to. I had dinner at Andrew's Coffee Tavern, but Isaac was not there.*

Mr. Justice Jelf warned Margaret to be careful as her evidence about seeing Isaac was inconsistent.

When Samuel Thomas Evans K.C., M.P. asked her if the chapel meeting was unfair to her, she said:

*Well, we only expected to see the deacons there, but there were different members. I know Rev. J. Jones of Fochriw. He is a very respectable man, and I did not object to him. I objected at the meeting to Mr. Rees Jenkins because he was a friend of Rev. Richards. If one of the deacons had questioned me, I would have told them of the misconduct on 18 December. It was not because I was confused as I told this Court yesterday, but, because I was speaking in Welsh, and I thought the thing would go further than the chapel, so I kept it to tell my solicitor.*

Mr. Justice Jelf again warned Margaret to be careful with her answers as she was giving testimony to take away Rev. Richards' living for life. There was no value in not telling the chapel meeting about 18 December, if she intended mentioning it later.

In answer to severe cross-examination by Samuel Thomas Evans K.C., M.P. about the inconsistencies in her answers, Margaret Davies said:

*On 14 January, Rev. Richards was at a quarterly meeting at Bargoed all day, and he had tea and spent the night with Mr. Jenkins of Hirwaun. On 15 January, Rev. Richards was with Rev. J. Jones of Fochriw. After Rev. Richards was given notice to leave the house, he asked Isaac to allow him to stay an extra week and that was agreed to.*

At this point, the jury made it clear that they could not place any reliance on the evidence given by Margaret Davies. Benjamin Francis-Williams K.C. and Samuel Thomas Evans K.C., M.P. argued on behalf of their clients before Mr. Justice Jelf said:

*It is a serious matter. The accusations were made without a shadow of foundation. Nobody would be safe if a person could come forward and make charges on specific dates, as Mrs Davies has done, and afterwards change those dates and give a different version of the story in a great number of particulars. The accusations against Rev. Richards are wholly and absolutely false, and the jury must make it clear by their verdict that justification failed. It is essential that the damages should be sufficient to make it clear to the world that the jury, after hearing the evidence, did not believe there was any foundation for the alleged misconduct.*

After a brief consultation, the jury returned a verdict for plaintiff, with £100 damages and cost.

Mr. Justice Jelf: *A most sensible figure, gentlemen.*

And I was able to fly back to Deri, to look for another wall from which to hear more gossip.

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## **A CHILD BURNED TO DEATH**

This was the headline above this sad report in *Cardiff and Merthyr Guardian* 26 January 1855 page 3:

*The inhabitants of Cefn Hengoed were completely overpowered with grief and sorrow on Wednesday, the 17<sup>th</sup> instant, by witnessing the awful spectacle of a little girl, aged four years, the fourth daughter of John Llewelyn, collier, Hengoed, who met her death under the following awful circumstances:- The mother of the child in question left three or four of her offspring in the house by themselves, whilst she went to the Cross Keys public-house, distance about 200 yards; and on returning, she being absent only a few minutes, the first spectacle which caught her view was the little child whom she had left in the house only a few minutes before, coming towards her, perfectly naked, having had her clothes burnt entirely, this leaving her completely without covering. She was burned to such a degree, that she only survived a few hours. An inquest was held on Friday, before G. Overton, Esq., and a respectable jury – J. Rees, Esq., Hengoed-house, foreman, - when the verdict entered into was that “it being frosty weather, the clothes of the deceased instantly caught fire, which caused her death.” The Coroner greatly animadverted upon the conduct of the mother of the child, and severely censured her for leaving her children in the house unprotected, which is a great warning to parents in future.*

### **Who was John Llewelyn?**

John Llewelyn, born a few miles west of Barry, in Vale of Glamorgan, had arrived in Gelligaer parish prior to the 1841 census when he was living in Ty Pwcca with his wife, Jane, and infant daughter, Ruth. Successive census returns show that the family continued to live in Gelligaer, Jane’s parish of birth, and that they had at least ten more children before the mid-1860s. A farm labourer, heading a household in Cefn Hengoed when the 1851 census was taken, John Llewelyn was a coalminer living in Cwrt y Bettin a decade later, and in Bargoed, in 1871. The sad fate of Elizabeth, born 1850 and the youngest of his four daughters in the household in the 1851 census return, is described above.

### **John Rees, foreman of the jury**

John Rees (1831-74) was the older of the two brothers at Cefn Hengoed farm. Both were well- respected as farmers and for their work in public life.

### **Coroner George Overton (1813-83)**

George Overton (1774-1827), an experienced engineer who, it is noted in *Merthyr Tydfil, a valley community* by Merthyr Teachers Centre Group (1981), was employed to engineer the Penydarren Tramroad and lived in Llanthetty Hall, Breconshire. For further information about him see [George Overton - Graces Guide](#), *Hereford Journal* 7 February 1827 page 3,

His son, also George Overton, married Eliza Ann Davies in 1839, and was listed as a solicitor in the 1841 census return. *Cardiff and Merthyr Guardian* (13 May 1848 page 2, and 20 May 1848 page 3) carried reports on the death and funeral of coroner, William Davies. George Overton was appointed in his place, and his obituary in *Cardiff Times* 5 May 1883 page 8, sheds light on his career as coroner:

*We regret to record the death of Mr. George Overton, of Watton Mount, Brecon, chairman of the Cefn bench of magistrates, which took place on Tuesday morning. The deceased gentleman had been ailing for some time, and, at his advanced age, the event was not so unlooked for as might otherwise have been the case. The deceased gentleman was also coroner for that portion of Glamorganshire, including Merthyr and Dowlais; [and Gelligaer] he was J.P. for county Brecon, and a member of the Brecon Town Council. In politics, the deceased gentleman was a staunch Liberal, and his death will be a sad loss to the Liberal cause in Breconshire.*

*Our Merthyr reporter writes:- At Watton Mount, Brecon, on Tuesday afternoon, died Mr. George Overton, son of an ironmaster, and member of one of the best Breconshire families. Mr. Overton commenced life as a solicitor at Merthyr, being head of the firm now known as “Morgan, White, and Morgan.” About 35 years ago the coronership of the county of Glamorgan was vacated, and Mr. Overton was a candidate for the office. In those days all the freeholders in the county could vote, and a contest was a very great undertaking. Nevertheless, Mr. Overton won, beating his opponent, the late Mr. James Ward Russell, by a very slight majority. This office Mr. Overton held to the time of his death, though he long ago ceased to discharge the duties appertaining to it, Mr. Thomas Williams, of Merthyr, having acted as his deputy for at least 22 years. As a deputy lieutenant of Breconshire, high sheriff (five years ago), and chairman of the Penderyn petty-sessions, Mr. Overton took an active interest in county business, and was a most regular attendant at all meetings where his services were required. He sat at the Penderyn petty-session court up to the commencement of the illness to which he had now succumbed, the last occasion being when the Messrs Harris were committed for trial on a charge of wounding the old man, Jenkin Morgan. Soon after he went to London on urgent business, where he caught a chill. After a few days’ illness, he was taken to his home at Brecon, and there he expired at 1.30 yesterday afternoon [1 May 1883]. At the last Brecon Quarter Sessions, Mr. Overton’s familiar face was greatly missed, and many anxious enquiries were made as to the cause of his absence. But few knew that even then he was but a few yards away from the court-rooms where he had so often sat, and in his last illness. Mr. Overton gave up his practice soon after his appointment as coroner, having large private means; in fact the greater part of Dowlais was his property. As an advanced Liberal, Mr. Overton was a great advocate of the working men’s rights, and in his death this class has lost a good friend. The deceased was about 70 years old, and leaves a widow, but no issue. The sad news of his death was received at Merthyr through the “South Wales Daily News” early in the afternoon, and general sympathy was expressed with the widow.*

**Election of coroner in succession to George Overton, Monday 21 May 1883** (based on report in *Weekly Mail* 26 May 1883 page 2)

Martin Scale:

*In the absence of the sheriff of the county, I, the under-sheriff, open this meeting.*

*The sheriff has summoned you, the freeholders of the Northern Division of Glamorganshire, to meet here in Vestry Room, Glebeland, Merthyr Tydfil, to appoint a coroner to replace George Overton who died on 1 May 1883.*

Martin Scale, under-sheriff reads the Lord Chancellor's writ.

*You have heard the Lord Chancellor's writ. Does anyone have a candidate to propose for the office?*

Rev. J. Griffiths, Rector of Merthyr:

*I have great pleasure in proposing a fair and proper person for the post – Mr. Thomas Williams, Troedyrhiw House. I am sure there is no one more likely to fulfil the office with credit to himself and with justice to all persons. We all know Mr. Williams in Merthyr, and I have known him since he was a boy. His claim is strengthened by the fact that for the last 22 years he has served as deputy-coroner, and really and actually as coroner for a very long time. Mr. Williams is a Welshman who is au fait with the language, and I think that in a district such as ours, it is necessary that the coroner should not only understand, but speak, Welsh. In conclusion, I propose Thomas Williams of Troedyrhiw House for the office of coroner for the Northern Division of Glamorganshire.*

Thomas Williams, J.P.:

*I thoroughly agree with what the Rector has said, and I second the proposition.*

Martin Scale:

*Are there any other candidates to be proposed?*

After a pause in which there was no response

*I declare Thomas Williams of Troedyrhiw House elected.*

Applause from the freeholders present.

Thomas Williams, Troedyrhiw House, newly-elected coroner for the Northern Division of Glamorganshire:

*I thank the freeholders for electing me as coroner for the Northern Division of Glamorganshire and assure you that in the future as in the past I will do everything to merit your confidence and to secure a due performance of the duties and maintain the dignity of the office.*

Applause from the freeholders present.

The under-sheriff was thanked for conducting the election and the meeting closed.

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