



GELLIGAER TIMES
NEWSLETTER OF GELLIGAER HISTORICAL SOCIETY
APRIL 2022 number 62
DIAMOND  **JUBILEE YEAR**

MESSAGE FROM EDITOR

This newsletter includes:

- GHS news
- Publications including recent and forthcoming
- Leftovers
- A first aid box found in a Gilfach allotment
- Fly on the wall
- News from other history/ 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.

David Mills Editor

GHS NEWS

GHS FEBRUARY MEETING was held in Llancaiach Fawr and on Zoom, 7 p.m. Wednesday 23 February. David Mills spoke briefly to members about *People's Collection Wales*, encouraging them to discuss with him possible input by individuals and the Society. The talk, delivered via Zoom by Terry McCarthy M.A., past chairman of GHS, was entitled *Coal for the Grand Fleet – The Jellicoe Specials*

GHS MARCH MEETING was held in Llancaiach Fawr and on Zoom, 7 p.m. Wednesday 30 March. The large audience found the talk, delivered by Dr. Stuart Broomfield and entitled *The development of Pontlottyn in the nineteenth century as the main industrial centre in the parish of Gelligaer*, both interesting and informative.

GHS APRIL MEETING, 7 p.m. start in Llancaiach Fawr and on Zoom on Wednesday 27 April for David Mills's talk on *D. Gethin Thomas, Founder member of the society and first editor 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.

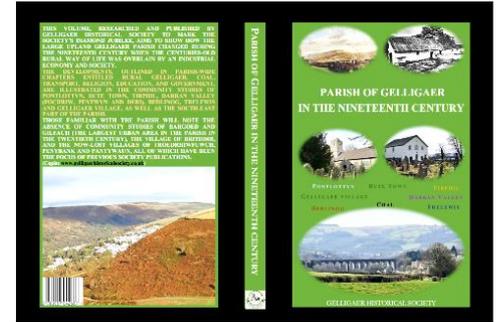
GHS MAY MEETING, 7 p.m. start in Llancaiach Fawr and on Zoom on Wednesday 25 May for Greg Buick's talk on *Gelligaer parish ratebooks, 1856-1910. A record of farms, housing, coal mines, railways, etc.*

GHS CONFERENCE – may 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. A review by Jeff Childs follows and there are some more **LEFTOVERS** from the book later in this newsletter. For copies of the volume, please see www.gelligaerhistoricalsociety.co.uk.

Review of the book by Jeff Childs

This excellent study of the parish of Gelligaer in the nineteenth century, in celebration of the Gelligaer Historical Society's Diamond Jubilee, has much to commend it. Though not purporting to cover all of the ancient ecclesiastical parish of that name (as previous publications by GHS already focus on those areas not falling within the ambit of this study) its geographical range is nonetheless extensive. The subjects explored are comprehensive in scope, place great emphasis on context and have an attention to detail which can only be admired. In addition to the Introduction, the volume contains fifteen substantial chapters, six of which are parish-wide in scope and



focus on rural Gelligaer, coal, transport, religion, education and government (both national and local). The remaining eight chapters represent community studies of the key areas of settlement where momentous and transformative agencies of change - industrial and social - are highlighted. All the chapters are illuminating and reflect the deep research the authors, either individually or jointly, have undertaken. Moreover, the Introduction provides key details as to the nature of the study, laying particular stress on the geographical boundaries (in this regard, it's particularly refreshing to see hamlets so clearly defined in a Welsh upland parish context and the vital role they played in local administration), the sources used and the historiography of Gelligaer, the latter providing a solid platform for planning and advancement. Planning is indeed the watchword as it is clear that the editorial team was systematic, rigorous and highly organised in this respect, judging from the quality of the final product and despite the challenges presented by the Covid-19 virus.

The community-based chapters focus on Gelligaer village, Pontllytyn, Bute Town, Tirphil, Darran valley (Fochriw, Pentwyn and Deri), Bedlinog and Trelewis as well as several falling within the south-east of the parish, namely Penpedairheol, Glanynant, Tiryberth, Cefn Hengoed, Hengoed and Ystrad Mynach. These chapters, enhanced as they are by many illustrations, clearly reveal the dynamics of change the area underwent as a result of industrialisation, inward migration and urbanisation as well as those of a more socio-political, educational and religious nature. There is, indeed, something for everyone in these case-study chapters, as there is in the more parish-wide, thematic ones, be it topography, archaeology, agriculture, landownership and occupation, land use, rural life, culture, social protest, demography, industry, transport, religion, education or government.

As with *Bargoed and Gilfach a local history* published by the Society in 2011 and the foundational *The Gelligaer Story* published by the Gelligaer Urban District Council in 1959, the authors have done the Society, as well as the communities which feature in this volume, proud. Serving as a model of its kind, it continues a tradition of excellence and distinction in terms of historical output by which many other local history societies (not to say historical researchers) cannot fail to be inspired, particularly if they intend to undertake a similar parochial project.

Jeff Childs
Penarth

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. Submissions by 30 April please to www.gelligaerhistoricalsociety.co.uk or chairman@gelligaerhistoricalsociety.co.uk

UPDATE ON GHS PUBLICATIONS – *Gelligaer 27* was published in September 2020, and number 28 is planned for 2022. Thanks to those members who have already submitted articles for inclusion in volume 28. Anyone else interested in contributing to volume 28, please contact www.gelligaerhistoricalsociety.co.uk or chairman@gelligaerhistoricalsociety.co.uk or speak to a member of GHS committee.

UPDATE ON GHS AND PEOPLE'S COLLECTION WALES [A People's Story of Wales | Peoples Collection Wales](#). The Society now holds an account on this website. Since starting the account three newsletters have been submitted and accepted for publication together with a photograph of Llwyngoleu Farmhouse, which once stood to the north of The Cross Inn, Gelligaer. A visit to the site will show that to the time of writing this, Newsletter for January 2021 has been viewed 76 times, January 2022-52 times and February 2022-35 times. The photograph of Llwyngoleu has been looked at 66 times. 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 gelligaerhs.photos@gmail.com

PUBLICITY - those researchers involved in the Society's recent publication on the parish in the nineteenth century are well aware that the half century or so before the outbreak of WWI saw the heyday of local newspapers. Not only were the newspapers of the time full of detailed reports on local events that interested the newly-literate and newly-enfranchised readers, but also, there was a multiplicity of such newspapers reflecting many different political standpoints. Although, like almost everything else, newspapers changed in post-WWI decades, some *Gelligaer Times* readers may remember that local newspapers continued to report at some length on many local events well into the second half of the twentieth century. In more recent years, things have changed, and GHS has found it difficult to secure a mention in the local press. However, thanks to the efforts of David Mills, who was interviewed by Rhys Williams, a reporter from the *Caerphilly Observer*, an account of GHS was published in its paper and online versions on 8 March 2022. This is the link to the online version - [Gelligaer Historical Society celebrating 60th anniversary \(caerphilly.observer\)](#)

PUBLICATIONS, INCLUDING RECENT AND FORTHCOMING, THAT MAY BE OF INTEREST

Note about a price increase *Gelligaer Times* 61 carried a notification that Lightmoor Press was launching *The Ocean Coal Company*, by Leslie M. Shore, on Wednesday, 6 April, 2022 at 7 p.m., in Stiwdio 1, Park and Dare Theatre, Treorchy (subject to Covid-19 restrictions). GHS has been informed that the price of the book is now £35, as costs of paper have increased, and the publishers have been forced to give prices *subject to change within three days*.

[Family History Books Online](#) You can use this website for online orders of a wide range of useful books relating to local and family history. One such book is *How Heavy, How Much and How Long? Weights, Money and Other Measures Used by Our Ancestors* by Colin R. Chapman. Why not browse the website to see if there is anything else that may be of use in your researches.

My Ancestor Was ..., a series published by the Society of Genealogists and available from The National Archives sheds light on the working lives and day to day experiences of people in the past. Titles include Agricultural Labourer, Merchant Seaman, Railway Worker, Apprentice, Coalminer, Royal Marine, Freemason, In Service.

These are the links to the websites [Home Page \(sog.org.uk\)](http://sog.org.uk) and [The National Archives](#)

The National Archives is one of many institutions with interesting blogs, and readers of *Gelligaer Times* may find this blog of interest [Local history in The National Archives Library - The National Archives blog](#) which will take you to a variety of things including suggestions for reading and TikTok!.

REGISTER OF HISTORIC PARKS AND GARDENS IN WALES – Following 2016 legislation and several years' work by RCAHMW and CADW in updating records for about four hundred sites dating from the thirteenth to twentieth centuries, on 1 February 2022 this statutory register made Wales the first UK nation to

give its historic parks and gardens the same protection as the country's listed buildings and scheduled monuments.

Although GHS's area of study does not include grand former gentry homes, castles and monasteries with impressive gardens, orchards and deer parks, GHS should value what it has. There is Llancaiach Fawr, and for further details on its history, including information about its gardens, see [Llancaiach Fawr Manor History Page - discover the history of the Manor. Llancaiach Fawr Manor](#) In recent years, GHS has been fortunate to benefit from the expertise of people such as Graeme Moore and Neville Davies. The former spoke to the Society about his research on the gardens of Trelewis and district, while the latter has shared his in-depth knowledge about birds, plants and animals on numerous occasions (eg in *Gelligaer Times* 50). Gardens and parks have evolved over time, responding to fashion and innovation, but they have been, and still are, vulnerable to land-use changes as well as the effects of climate change. Is anyone in GHS interested in researching the history of local parks and gardens, including older parks such as that in Bargoed and the new country parks on former colliery sites as well as the many domestic gardens and allotments locally?

This book is now available. It has xii + 436pp and costs £12 (+ £3.00 p&p). It may be ordered from Mr Phil Morgan, 9, Lakeside Gardens, Merthyr Tydfil, CF48 1EN, phil.morgan4415@btinternet.com

- Please state the number of copies needed and your name and delivery address, and please supply a phone number/e-mail address in case of need for contact.
- Order by letter or by e-mail and pay either **by cheque** to Merthyr Tydfil & District Historical Society or **by transfer** to Merthyr Tydfil & District Historical Society A/c No 04137558 Sort Code 54 10 02

DOWLAIS EDUCATIONAL SETTLEMENT Trevett

DOWLAIS EDUCATIONAL SETTLEMENT
and the Quaker John Dennithorne



CHRISTINE TREVETT

Merthyr Tydfil Historical Society

ISBN 978-0-9929810-8-2

This is the untold story of Dowlais Educational Settlement which had started life as an Unemployed Men's Club in 1929. It is also the story of the talented sculptor turned social worker, a Quaker, who was most closely linked with it. At the time of the General Strike in 1926 a group of Quakers spearheaded a move among some in the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) to 'do something' alongside the unemployed in hard-hit South Wales. The Dowlais Unemployed Men's Club was one of many which were outcomes of that move and over several years its work evolved into that of an Educational Settlement.

In Britain Educational Settlements were significant in the evolution of Adult Education and education for leisure. The South Wales Settlements in the Depression and beyond were distinctive and were very much a product of their setting. In an economically shattered and politically lively County Borough of Merthyr Tydfil the Dowlais Educational Settlement and its unconventional Quaker Warden would be concerned with a lot more than adult education.

Numerous published and unpublished sources, images and personal recollections have been used to set the Settlement story against the backcloth of local people's difficulties and resilience. Many lives were touched by the work of the Settlement and of its Warden, the Londoner John Dennithorne, a man whose own life was far from ordinary and whose commitment to South Wales was unshakable.

DOWLAIS EDUCATIONAL SETTLEMENT AND THE QUAKER JOHN DENNITHORNE, by Christine Trevett. Merthyr Tydfil Historical Society, 2022. xii + 436 pp, Pbk. Illus. £12 (plus £3 p&p)

On opening this volume, readers will expect to learn about Dowlais Educational Settlement and John Dennithorne. However, as they move through the pages, they will be pleasantly surprised by the book's depth and breadth, leading them to a clearer understanding not only of the Quakers and their history and philosophy, but also of the area's complex social, economic and political scene in the 1920s and 30s, and the changes in the following decades.

The book is divided into three parts.

In order to ensure the reader understands both the Quakers and the area, the author starts by setting the scene. She introduces the Quakers both in the national context and in the Merthyr Tydfil area from the seventeenth century to the 1920s. Although many local people saw the Quakers as different, they may well have been familiar with Quaker family products such as Huntley and Palmer biscuits, Reckitts laundry products, Clark's shoes and Fry's chocolates, while *Frederick William Harris, born into a steamship owning family whose Quaker roots ran deep was principal shareholder of The Harris Navigation Steam Coal Company. Treharris took its name from him and its pits sold their first coal in 1879.* The scene-setting continues with the focus shifting to the Educational Settlements and the Quakers' role in their development. In the 1920s, as successive governments failed to deal with unemployment and associated problems, there were some inspirational local responses including Maes-yr-Haf, Trealaw, Rhondda, and, perhaps of more interest to *Gelligaer Times* readers, Bargoed Settlement, which was the first home of GHS. (see notes below on Maes-yr-Haf and on Bargoed Settlement) The book's first part is rounded off with attention to the realities of the situation within Merthyr County Borough, including some particular references to effects on parts of GHS's area of study, For example in 1925, the fact that *The collieries linked with Guest Keen and Nettleford, Fochriw, Cwmbargoed and Bedlinog had been closed with the loss of 4,263 jobs* was among the points cited in support of the significant rise in the numbers receiving outdoor relief in Merthyr Tydfil Union.

Having set the scene, the author moves on to deal with Dowlais Educational Settlement. We read *Dowlais Educational Settlement was affiliated to the ESA in 1935. The road from a single Club [for unemployed men] to becoming a Settlement had not been easy but its affiliation was surely a vindication of sorts.* The description of the challenging journey gives the author the opportunity to explore the contemporary social, economic and political character of the area as well as the nature of the opposition to outsiders like John Dennithorne, a man who said he worked alongside men who were *experienced in the sadness of life* and who *fired him 'simply with the need to continue'*. Together Trewern House in Gwernllwyn Road, The Armoury in High Street, premises in Horse Street, and Gwernllwyn House, made up Dowlais Educational Settlement, and were the venues for a wide range of academic, vocational, cultural and craft activities. The separate chapters on the Settlement's work regarding summer camps, including women's clubs, allotments, crafts for women, the opening of Wales's first nursery school (in 1933), a house-building experiment (which resulted in the erection of just two family houses), and music, drama and art, not only highlight the work of a number of individuals so crucial to the story of Dowlais Educational Settlement but also shed further light on the area's contemporary social and economic conditions. The house-building scheme, involving *labour given voluntarily by the unemployed for the benefit of others like themselves*, was opposed by trade unions while the press queried the wisdom of *building in such a place which in all likelihood 'will never prosper again'*. The Settlement's *activity had fresh relevance in wartime* with increased emphasis on facilitating thrift and on activities for the young. The summer camps were replaced by fruit- and hop-picking ventures, while the hands of many were applied to knitting *comforts* for the soldiers. In the much-changed post-Second World War era, Dowlais Educational Settlement organized some short-term international volunteer work camps for practical post-war reconstruction, including those in Pantywaun in 1950 and Nelson in 1953. *Gelligaer Times* readers may be especially interested in the work camp in Gilfach. Ten females and seven males from Germany, Finland and California, all aged 16-18 and guided by more experienced workers, decorated the building and changed the *steep slope and wilderness* outside into a lawn, to complete the conversion of the former Tabernacle Welsh Congregational chapel into a pensioners' centre which, prior to the pandemic lockdown of March 2020, was still used as such. The book's second part concludes with further information on the post-war scene and an appendix about Merthyr Tydfil Educational Settlement.

The chapters in the final part deal with Londoner John Dennithorne (1895-1984), *a much-travelled man; a sculptor; a Quaker immersed in Quaker-initiated relief and support work; an advocate for peace and against nuclear weapons who favoured direct action and was willing to pay the price for it; someone who had been a support for many.*

His father and grandfather had earned a living in nineteenth century Cornwall in the tanning industry, but his father moved to Bermondsey (London) before the 1891 census was taken. John Dennithorne, born and brought up in a Bermondsey that he described as *a lively but ugly place*, was influenced by his father and, after his

mother's death in 1901, by his much older half-sister, as well as the local Salvation Army. Aged 14, he started work in a publisher's office in High Holborn before, following the outbreak of war, occupying a clerical post in Metropolitan Water Board's solicitor's department. He was probably involved in some voluntary social work initiatives, but it is not clear if he met Alfred and Ada Salter, prominent Bermondsey Quakers. He was the family's chief breadwinner until his sister qualified as a teacher in 1916. Then, aged 21, he joined the Royal Naval Air Service, and opted for the Navy when the services merged in 1918. Following demobilisation, he served in the Merchant Navy, and extant correspondence suggests a developing love concern that came to nothing.

In 1921, and supported by his savings, John Dennithorne started his studies in sculpture in London's Central School of Arts and Crafts. He was soon awarded an open scholarship to support him for the following three years, but an image of *the emaciated body of a child* changed his path. In 1922, JD abandoned his arts studies to respond to that famine in post-revolutionary Russia. He was not a Quaker but he volunteered with the Quaker agency and he was sent to the Buzuluk region. He was invalided home with *malignant malaria* in 1923, but the sights and experiences in Russia remained with him for the rest of his life. Back in London he regained health and returned to his studies. On graduation he found work assisting some of the age's better-known sculptors in executing their commissions for public art, including war memorials.

In 1928, he said that *one Sunday morning after Quaker meeting I was challenged both as an artist and as a member of the meeting to think more closely about South Wales and the miners and problems and needs....* Working in Dowlais, although identified as a Quaker, he was perhaps more of a Gandhian. Having met Gandhi in London in November 1930, John Dennithorne described him as *this fragile human being Fragile with his extreme vegetarian diet, and the frugality of his way of life.* He adopted some of Gandhi's values as, accepting only the salary that he needed to pay for basic needs, and usually tie-less and clad in shorts, he sought to transform the Dowlais community. Although he was part of the Gandhian Fellowship of Friends of Truth network, there were many other names linked with that Trust's community in Garthnewydd House, Brecon Road, for less than four years to 1961.

By the time of the Second World War, John Dennithorne's life experience, including his *active Christian pacificism fed by his Quakerism and his Gandhian sympathies*, made him a committed pacifist. He maintained that stance in the post-war years, when his active support for the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament resulted in his imprisonment on four separate occasions.

John Dennithorne had contact with The Order of Blue Pilgrims when, in the inter-war years, they sought to help disadvantaged communities within the industrial communities, and he was known within the Order as *Gatherer*. In the 1930s there were summer camps for the unemployed in Woodford House, Llantwit Major, home of Pilgrim Desire (Emma Mary Turner) and leased by the Order. The property was commandeered by the Ministry of Defence in wartime and the Order did not renew the lease after the war. However, as Desire needed a home and a base from which to continue her work, in 1949 volunteers built a bungalow, Ty Pererin, on a small portion of the land. After she died in 1964, John Dennithorne assumed control of Ty Pererin, while still maintaining his work in the Merthyr/Dowlais area. It was at Ty Pererin that JD spent the closing months of his life.

In the preface, the author acknowledged that this was *a project far removed from its author's comfort zone*, that *information about governance of the Dowlais Educational Settlement was at best scrappy*, and, like countless other contemporary researchers, she faced an added difficulty when pandemic lockdowns made libraries and archives out of bounds. However, her skill in seeking out what sources there are, as well as the perceptive analysis and interpretation that can only come from an experienced and hard-working historian, shine through this well-presented volume. Meticulously footnoted and with a ten-page bibliography, it is amply illustrated, mainly with black and white photographs. Set within an attractive green cover with Cedric Morris's *Dowlais from the Cinder Tips, Caeharris*, setting the tone, it is a worthwhile addition to the library of anyone interested in the history of this area in the half century following the end of World War I.

NOTES:

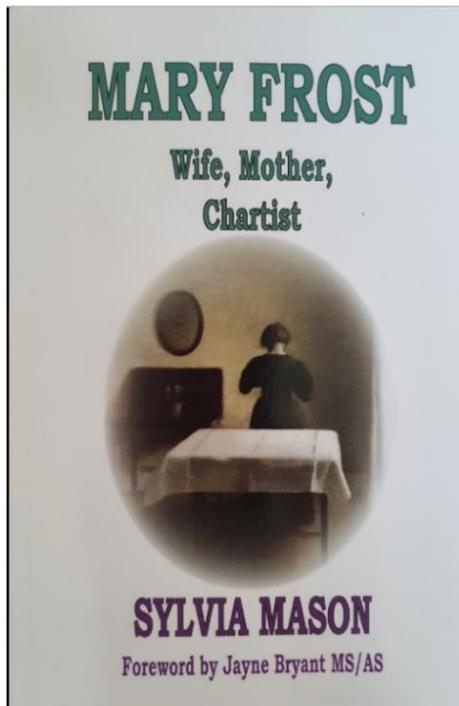
- For more on Maes-yr-Haf see [Maes-yr-haf Educational Settlement, Trelaw Rhondda - Archives Hub \(jisc.ac.uk\)](http://www.jisc.ac.uk)
- *Gelligaer Times* readers may like to be reminded of Nesta Williams's *Bargoed Settlement 1933-1998*, a small volume published in 1999 and available for loan and/or reference in several of CCBC libraries.

- Tabernacle Welsh Congregational chapel, Gilfach, is mentioned in *BARGOED AND GILFACH A LOCAL HISTORY* p 204.

Annie Owen

Chair GHS

MARY FROST, WIFE, MOTHER, CHARTIST-Sylvia Mason's book on the wife of Chartist John Frost is now available (£12 including p & p) from sylviamason1@gmail.com. Proceeds will be divided between *Newport Women's Forum* and *Our Chartist Heritage*.



This is Sylvia's second book, published under the auspices of Newport Women's Forum. Her first book was entitled *Every Woman Remembered*. The Forum consists of a group of women who had their savings boosted when their building society became a bank. It is led by a founding member, Dame Rosemary Butler, and offers an annual bursary to help women achieve their dreams. As an example, a student was awarded funds to undertake a Voluntary Service Overseas placement in Nigeria.

Sylvia has approached the task of writing about Mary Frost in a methodical and thorough way. She sets out the life of Mary Frost in eighteen chapters, which she has categorized by using the years of Mary's life (1782-1857). Not unexpectedly the year of the Chartist Rising (1839) is dealt with in four chapters which cover the various months of that tumultuous year. Mary had kept John Frost's profitable drapery business going when he devoted so much of his time to politics.

Throughout the chapters Sylvia poses questions which make the reader stop and think about what might have happened or what Mary's thoughts may have been about certain events in her life which would

have caused her much sorrow and disappointment. Her son, by her first marriage, was William Foster Geach, a clever and astute solicitor; but also, a forger who defrauded not only his clients but also his own mother and the defence fund set up to aid John Frost's legal representation at his trial. Two of her daughters by John Frost, Sarah and Ellen, chose to marry men who probably caused much despair to her. Sarah's first husband was Harry Fry an out-and-out anti-chartist who was also a rogue and womaniser. Ellen married William Davies who had been a good friend of John Frost. However, after the Rising he became a witness for the prosecution in the case against Frost. He mysteriously disappeared before the trial, only to emerge some months later and marry Ellen; how did Mary and John feel about this?

Sylvia writes *Mary Frost was a quiet, modest woman who kept herself in the background. She was described as a lady by birth, education and fortune. But it was her qualities of strength and resilience which were essential for her to survive all the devastating events which lay before her.* Sylvia has used her skills to uncover all those *devastating events*, not an easy task when writing about someone who was overshadowed by her husband's "activities". This book is both a welcome, and necessary, addition for anyone interested in the history of Chartism, or for that matter in the everyday life of some women in the 1800s. Jane Bryant, a member of the Senedd wrote in her foreword *Generally women have been defined in history by their role as mothers, wives, sisters and daughters. Their voices lost like whispers in the wind.* It is my view that Sylvia has done much to reveal those voices and hopefully this book will encourage others to examine the lives of other women. The adage of "behind every good man is a good woman" has been proved by Sylvia.

David Mills

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.

REPORT FROM THE HILLS

The following, one of the items described in the newspaper as *interesting news*, appeared in *Cardiff Times 13* August 1859 page 3 under *THE HILLS*, a headline that reflected the way in which Cardiffians thought of contemporary upper Rhymney valley communities:

PONTLOTTYN – A story is current in the parish of Gellygaer that a relieving-officer, who has a wife and family, had so far forgot his position as to work upon the simplicity of a young girl, and persuade her to marry him. The scheme was, however, frustrated, and an enraged body of women made him quit the scene of his courtship greatly chagrined.

While it is difficult for the local historian to identify the parties concerned, it is easier to imagine the thoughts and actions of the *enraged body of women* mentioned. Soon afterwards, readers of *Merthyr Telegraph* (3 September 1859 page 2) learned that a meeting of the Board of Guardians received the resignation of James Jones, relieving officer, of Gelligaer, and instructed the clerk to place advertisements for candidates in the local press. This is one such advertisement.

What was a relieving officer?

The 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act ushered in a new regime to deal with the country's poor. It was administered by Poor Law Commissioners, a small central government department, and locally-elected Boards of Guardians across the country.

The country was divided into unions of parishes based on a major urban community. Gelligaer was one of the parishes in Merthyr Tydfil Union. Most *Gelligaer Times* readers will know of the workhouse in Merthyr Tydfil but may have limited knowledge of other ways of helping the post-1834 poor. The Board of Guardians met regularly, and employed a clerk, their chief officer, workhouse personnel, assistant overseers and relieving officers. Merthyr Tydfil Union was divided into three districts, each with a relieving officer. *The First Annual Report of the Poor Law Commissioners* (1836) described the work of the relieving officer thus:

It will be their duty to conduct the preparatory changes of the existing system of out-door relief. It will be their business to investigate the existing claims and all new claims to relief, and to administer relief strictly according to the statute, and in conformity to the regulations of the Poor Law Commissioners

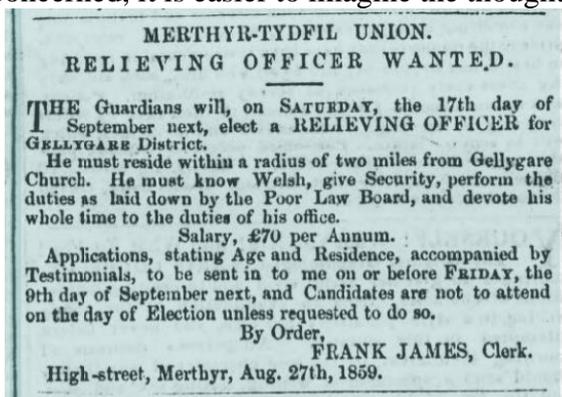
The able-bodied poor received *indoor relief* (in the workhouse), while those unable to work received *outdoor relief* (in their own home). For further information on the operation of the 1834 legislation in Merthyr Tydfil Union see *POOR RELIEF IN MERTHYR TYDFIL UNION IN VICTORIAN TIMES*, Tydfil Thomas, Glamorgan Archive Service publication (1992).

JOHN HAYDEN'S ELOPEMENT

John Hayden was a young and stalwart navvy/collier lodging in the Pentwynmawr home of Frank Gerrish when he became enamoured of Mrs Gerrish. The story of their elopement can be traced in the contemporary press – *South Wales Echo* 28 May 1886 page 4 and 2 June 1886 page 4; *Smethwick Telephone* 5 June 1886 page 6.

On the morning of 22 May 1886, Frank Gerrish went, as usual, to work in Celyn Colliery, Abercarn, but, as there was no work, he returned home by 7 o'clock, to find the key under the door and the house empty. The pair had eloped. Setting out to track them down, Frank Gerrish went to Blackwood and discovered they had hired a trap and driven to Pengam railway station where he caught up with them waiting on the platform for the next train. A stormy scene followed; Mrs Gerrish refused to return home with Frank Gerrish; and she left with John Hayden on the up train, presumably as far as Fochriw where the pair found lodgings in John Hayden's sister's house.

As John Hayden had property belonging to him, Frank Gerrish decided to find an answer in the law, and issued a warrant. John Hayden was arrested on 24 May in his sister's house in Fochriw. On Tuesday 1 June, he appeared in Tredegar Police Court before Dr. Coates and Revd Rees Jones, where he pleaded guilty to stealing



wearing apparel (valued £3) of Frank Gerrish on the morning of 22 May. John Hayden was sentenced to three months hard labour in Usk prison.

HARPIST EBENEZER REES AND TY UN NOS

Ebenezer Rees was born in Sirhowy about 1824. It is not clear where and when he learned to play the harp but he was listed as a fifteen-year-old *harper* in the 1841 census return. A decade later and he was listed as a married harper and coalminer. It was reported in the press that, when, on a Thursday in September 1856, a house *slated and glazed* was raised overnight on high ground near Pontlottyn, local people feared it would start a trend. The house was on land of Rhymney Iron Company and the authorities intervened. Ebenezer Rees, *pleading ignorance*, did not face legal proceedings, just the humiliation of having to remove all trace of his dwelling. Further research is necessary to determine if the numerous other press reports of the 1850s and 60s that mention Ebenezer Rees, harpist, refer to the same man.

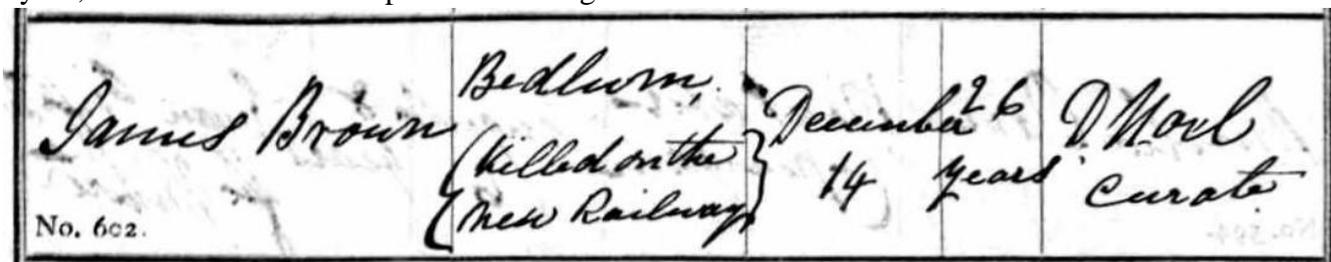
JAMES BROWN (1830-1856)

The railways brought great changes and many advantages within the local area, but that did not come without a human cost, as illustrated by James Brown, a 26-year-old excavator, killed by *a fall of earth* on Thursday 11 December. The press report (*Cardiff and Merthyr Guardian* 20 December 1856 page 6) on the inquest, held by coroner George Overton in Coopers Arms on 13 December, sheds some light on the fatal accident at Bedwlwyn during the construction of the new line for Rhymney Railway as well as the verdict, *accidental death*.

The evening before the accident, James Brown was among those who attended Mr Noyle's cottage lecture delivered near their works and in which Mr Noyle spoke on Genesis chapter 19, with especial reference to *Escape for thy life ... You who are young and strong and thoughtless, may be flattering yourselves, at this moment that you are safe for a few years enjoyment at least. Do not deceive yourselves, the Sodomites disregarded the warnings of God's messengers, but the very next day they were all consumed in the ruins of their city, and so your death warrant may be already signed, and that, ere the sun shall rise again, or soon after some of you may be summoned to appear before your God.*

The press report continued, *and such was really the case with one who heard the above striking words. Had it not been for this cottage lecture, it is more than probable that this poor man would have gone to eternity, without having heard the word of God for years past -- who can tell what change the striking words he had heard the night before might have wrought in his mind during the few moments that elapsed, between the time he met with the accident, and the time when his soul appeared before his God.*

On the Sunday after the accident, James Brown's body was taken to Gelligaer *by some scores of his comrades, every one of whom wore a snow white frock with a white rosette*. The funeral service was held in the church, and, when curate Revd D. Noel, went into the pulpit, he told the congregation that, as he thought they were not in the habit of attending a place of worship, he would preach on Matthew chapter 25 *Watch therefore, for he knew neither the day nor the hour when the son of man cometh*. The press report continued by noting that his supposedly hardened workmates were *almost moved to tears*. James Brown's burial, in Gelligaer churchyard, is recorded thus in the parish burial register:



PONTLOTTYN SOUP KITCHEN 1898

Extracts from *Penny Illustrated Paper* 10 September 1898 pp 13-14 and *The Sketch* 7 September 1898 page 285

The Soup-Kitchen at Pontlottyn, South Wales.

Pontlottyn is one of the large coal-mining parishes on the hills of Glamorganshire. It borders upon Merthyr and Dowlais on one side and upon Tredegar on the other. The parish consists of six colliery villages with about 7000 inhabitants entirely dependent upon the coal. In villages such as these during a strike the people have absolutely nothing to subsist on, as they may have in older and more established towns. The Vicar (the Rev. T. Rees), with a staff of workers, has kept a soup-kitchen for children open here for the last eighteen weeks. Great care is taken that the children only are relieved, and each child has to bring a cup and eat its food in the school-room before returning home.

A great number of the children are without shoes or stockings, and are in a terribly destitute state. I know it is the duty of colliers (as it is of other members of the community) to see that those dependent upon them do not want the ordinary necessaries of life before they take the grave step of going out on strike. But, for all that, in this Christian country children must not be left to starve. The pitiful condition of the hungry little ones fed by this worthy Vicar has been painfully brought home to me by some photographic groups sent me. Money will be well bestowed forwarded for this humane purpose to the Rev. T. Rees, The Vicarage, Pontlottyn, Cardiff.



POOR CHILDREN AT PONTLOTTYN.

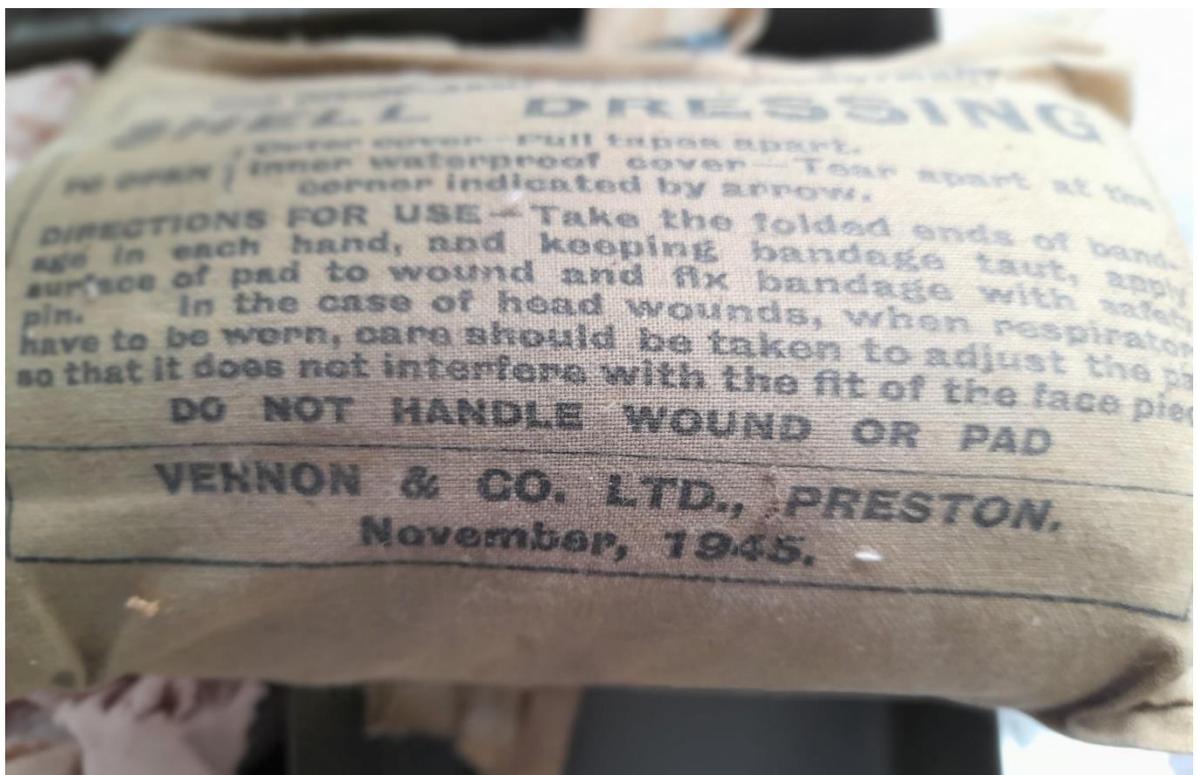
WHAT IS THE STORY OF THIS FIRST AID BOX FOUND AT GILFACH ALLOTMENTS?

GHS member Pat Davies has kindly loaned the Society a tin box so that hopefully publicity in this newsletter may enable a reader or readers to solve some unanswered questions, such as why the box was buried in an allotment? and were there American troops stationed in the area during WW 2 ?

The insignia on the box and the words around it are not legible in the photo but the words at the top are

U. S. ARMY and below

Medical Regiment.



The rusty insignia on the box may well be the same as the one that appears in the photo below:





FLY ON THE WALL

DERI RACES AND SPORTS

based on a report in *Western Mail* 13 August 1873 page 3

On Monday morning, 11 August 1873, I was buzzing round the press reporter in Nantybwch boarding the train to Rhymney *en route* to *Deri Races and Sports*, a highlight of the social and sporting calendar for people in those parts. I buzzed around the passengers on the short journey to Rhymney until, seeing the reporter leave the train, I followed him onto the B&M train for the onward journey to the races.

The reporter and I alighted at White Rose alongside Tredegar Arms. Following him as he headed off in a westerly direction. I hitched a lift on his shoulder for *a good smart pull over a very steep hill to the races on a lofty eminence within a mile and a half of*

Pontlottyn. He huffed and puffed up the hill before reaching the event where *the mountain breeze proved most refreshing*.

The event was policed by Sergeant Jenkins and three constables, and one of them introduced the reporter to the *racing committee*. In case you are interested, I will tell you the names of these men: the stewards were Lieutenant Leigh of Cascade, J.M. Davies of Plascoed, Mr. John of Rhoswen, J.L. Howells of Gwaelod-y-Waun, C. Evans of Penheolcerrig, T. Williams of Dowlais and E. Pritchard of Brithdir; the judge for the day was E.C. Evans of New Tredegar, the starter William Humphreys, and the clerk of the course C. Davis of Deri.

During the day, the crowd grew *and towards evening the mountain-top was well peopled by the neighbouring residents*. I buzzed around all day -- going in and out the two refreshment tents in which D.W. Davies of Bargoed Inn and his staff were busy with the catering, but not too close to Buchan's dray where Foresters' Band from Dowlais *played with as much spirit as if the brewery was under the cart*. I buzzed around the ponies and the crowds, especially among those gathered excitedly by the hurdles (there was no grandstand) close to the winning post.

Gabe's Black Tom won the first prize, a saddle and bridle, in the race for ponies not exceeding 12 hands, while the second prize, *a silver mounted riding whip*, went to *Morgan's Little Polly*. In the absence of opposition in the hurdles race, *Surplus was allowed to walk over the course, and jump the hurdles and carry off the prize*. There were also a race for ponies over 14 hands, and a Galloway race, as well as foot races for the men.

At one point during the day, spectator John Davies of Darran was standing on the course when he was hit by a running horse. He fell to the ground and his shoulder was put out. *Dr. Turner, Dr. Evans, and assistants were on the spot, and the injured joint was speedily put right and Davies was able to walk home*.

As I buzzed around, I sensed the reporter's frustration with the event and so I was not surprised to find that he wrote:

The time lost between each race was something unusual in my experience, and I hope the Deri folks will not be offended if I advise them to take a hint in racing matters from their neighbours in Blackwood.

The ascent on one side and the descent on the other in going to and from the racecourse are really too fatiguing, and if the races are to be continued, it will be advisable to find a spot more on a level with one's friends.

But he summed up by noting *the crowd behaved remarkably well, and refrained from taking more than was necessary in the way of stimulants*.

NEWS FROM OTHER HISTORY/HERITAGE GROUPS

Merthyr Tydfil Historical Society -- you can keep up-to-date with the lecture programme by visiting [MTHSprogram.pdf](#) or, go to <https://merthyrttydfilheritage.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. A review of their new publication (*Dowlais Educational Settlement*) appears under the PUBLICATIONS heading above.

Blaenau Gwent Heritage Forum -- you can visit [BGHF Home - BGHF \(blaenau-gwent-heritage-forum.co.uk\)](#) for details of their publications, talks and autumn 2022 Heritage Day.