



# Gelligaer Times

**Newsletter of the Gelligaer Historical Society**

**No. 18**

[www.gelligaerhistoricalsociety.co.uk](http://www.gelligaerhistoricalsociety.co.uk)

**Summer 2010**

By the time you read this, the days will have started to get shorter and, I hope you are, like me, looking forward to a new season with Gelligaer Historical Society. The Society was formed nearly five decades ago to foster the growing interest in the history and heritage of that part of north east Glamorganshire under the jurisdiction of Gelligaer Urban District Council, an area almost coincidental with that of the large upland medieval parish of Gelligaer. Local government boundaries have changed since the early 1960s, but Gelligaer Historical Society still pursues the same aim.

During the coming year, the Society will continue to strive to raise its profile and attract members and visitors interested in the history and heritage of the area to its monthly meetings (see the attractive programme elsewhere in Gelligaer Times) held at the prestigious venue of Llancaiach Fawr. At the same time, and largely via its website, the Society will further develop its links with exiles, both in UK and elsewhere in the world, and help extend their knowledge and understanding of an area they or their ancestors, may have called home at some time.

Yet again, Gelligaer Historical Society, supported by Caerphilly County Borough Council (Llancaiach Fawr Manor and Winding House), is organising the Autumn History Conference. Details are included in this issue of Gelligaer Times, and, as places are limited, you are advised to book early to ensure a place at what promises to be another interesting, informative and thought-provoking day.

Gelligaer Historical Society is currently making plans to mark its Golden Jubilee season 2011-2012 and if any Gelligaer Times reader can suggest appropriate activities and events, please get in contact with the editor or the Society's website.

*Annie Owen*

## **Society Officers 2010-11**

The following were elected at the AGM held on June 30th

Chair	Annie Owen
Vice Chair and Programme Secretary	David Mills
Membership	Jean Kember
Treasurer	Judith Jones
Publicity Secretary	Iris Owens
Webmaster	Greg Buick
Book and Journal Sales Officer	Anna Gallego

Mr Islwyn Hughes remains as President

## **Joint History Conference Autumn 2010.**

Gelligaer Historical Society, Caerphilly County Borough Council Museum & Heritage Service, The Winding House and Llancaiach Fawr wish to give notice of the fourth annual Autumn History Conference.

We apologise for the delay in communicating this to you all, but changing circumstances have affected the organisation of the conference, including Terry

McCarthy's planned relocation and the implications for our partners of the prevailing financial situation – neither Llancaiach Fawr, nor the Winding House are able to give the same level of support as in past years. The latter accounts for the increase in delegate ticket prices.

**Date:** Saturday 23 October 2010.

**Time:** 09.30 for 10.00 till 16.30

**Venue:** Llancaiach Fawr.

**Cost:** Tickets (pre-booked) £15 per head, including a buffet lunch and tea/coffee during breaks

**Format of day:** Five presentations on a balanced range of historical topics relating to south Wales history delivered by experts in their field will be staged in the Educational Annex. (see below)

In the Barn – provision (1 table each, 6' x 2') for 10 local historical organisations to put-on displays and/or sell journals etc. Invitations for societies /organisations to have a space in the Barn have been sent-out. Spaces will be allocated on a first come, first served basis.

Delegates will be limited to a maximum of 90. Tickets are likely to be on sale from the beginning of September 2010, but a further communication (GHS web site – [www.gelligaerhistoricalsociety.com](http://www.gelligaerhistoricalsociety.com) ) will be sent out when tickets will be available. As in 2009, they will be available for purchase on a first come, first served basis from Gelligaer Historical Society.

We look forward to welcoming you all to a conference, we hope will provide interest, stimulation and enjoyment for all who support the event.

#### Conference Schedule

09.15 Arrival, registration of delegates (Tea/coffee may be purchased from 08.45)

10.00 Welcome & Introduction to Day

10.05 Brian Davies (Curator Pontypridd Museum)

**William Edwards – Bridge Builder**

11.05 Mallt Anderson <http://fforwmhanescymru.org.uk/gwenllian.htm>

**We are an inexplicable society: Seven Centuries after Princess Gwenllian**

12.05 Buffet Lunch – in "the Barn"

13.05 Dr. Paul O'Leary (Aberystwyth University)

see <http://www.aber.ac.uk/~hstwww/staff/ppo/index.htm>

**Irish in south Wales**

14.05 Richard K. Morriss (Leeds University)

see <http://www.leeds.ac.uk/ims/about/staffdetails.html#morriss>

**Houses don't Read**

15.05 Tea/coffee - Barn

15.30 Gethin Matthews (Cardiff University)

see [http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/hisar/contactsandpeople/academicstaff/K-](http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/hisar/contactsandpeople/academicstaff/K-O/matthews-gethin-mr-overview_new.html)

[O/matthews-gethin-mr-overview\\_new.html](http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/hisar/contactsandpeople/academicstaff/K-O/matthews-gethin-mr-overview_new.html)

**'Welsh Voices of the Great War', Project**

16.30 Conference Ends

**Terry McCarthy**

### Update on the Bargoed-Gilfach Project

Our team of researchers continues to work on this Project and is regularly uncovering more and more interesting information about the development of Bargoed and Gilfach, the largest urban area within the former Gelligaer Urban District.

Did you know that in 1926?

- Bargoed and District Amateur Operatic Society performed *Pirates of Penzance* at Hanbury Cinema.
- Fire caused £20,000 worth of damage at Bargoed Colliery.

- There were 72 applicants for post of Headmaster at Lewis School, Pengam.
- First passenger-carrying vehicle travelled up and down Aberbargoed Hill, one of most awkward and steep roads in South Wales.

Do you remember that in 1961?

- Alice Edwards Room opened in Bargoed Emporium.
- Paul Shreder of Heolddu Avenue, was invited to work in the Florence studio of Annigoni.
- C.R.S. had a Show House in John Street, with solid fuel fired central heating.

If you feel you can contribute to the Project in any way please contact us (☎ 01443 813122, [registrar.owen@virgin.net](mailto:registrar.owen@virgin.net) or via the website [www.gelligaerhistoricalsociety.co.uk](http://www.gelligaerhistoricalsociety.co.uk)). We hope, funding permitting, to be able to publish the work during Autumn 2011 as part of Gelligaer Historical Society Golden Jubilee activities.

Annie Owen

### Program of Talks for 2010-2011

September 29th	Elizabeth Baker	Roman Food
October 27th	Gwyn Griffiths	Evan James and his links to Gelligaer Parish <i>Gelligaer's connection with the author of the Welsh National Anthem</i>
November 24th	Greg Buick	The coming of Surnames to Gelligaer Parish <i>A look at the change from traditional names to surnames in Gelligaer</i>
December 15th	Mark Lewis	Roman Origins of our Christmas and Customs <i>Curator of the Roman Museum Caerleon - Christmas was not invented by the Victorians!</i>
January 26th	Society Dinner	
February 23rd	Jean Kember	The gentry houses of Gelligaer parish
March 30th	Geoff Morris	The Welsh Longhouse
April 27th	Dr Edith Evans	Historic Church buildings in Llandaff Diocese
May 25th	Paul Busby	Evan Morgan 2nd Viscount Tredegar

A booking has been made for a group visit to Glamorgan Archives Wednesday 3 November at 10.30 am -- visit will last about 1½ hours - tour of building, behind the scenes, and a look at some documents. The group visit is free but people will have to make their own way to Glamorgan Archives. Please let us know if you are interested



Jean readily agreed to give a talk. On the night we were treated to two talks as

### Meetings Reports

At our meeting in May members presented Nesta Jones who has been a member of the society for many years with a small gift on the occasion of her 90th birthday.

#### December 2009

On the morning of the meeting David Mills, our programmes secretary, received a frantic call from Elizabeth Baker who was due to talk to us about Roman Food. Elizabeth had broken a tooth and needing urgent dental work had to postpone her visit; she was bitterly disappointed as she had carried out a lot of preparatory work and was looking forward to her visit. Another frantic phone call from David to Jean Kember got things back on track as

Jean had “persuaded” Greg Buick to join her. So unusually we had two shorter talks but it worked very well.

Jean is rapidly acquiring an excellent reputation for her ability to talk in depth about gentry families in the Gelligaer area .Her knowledge of their pedigrees is immense. You could say she is almost a modern day bard like those employed by the old gentry families who could recite pedigrees at the drop of a hat, the link to their ancestors being important. Jean concluded her session with some very thought provoking views about the castle mound at Gelligaer. We look forward to hearing more on this topic in future. Greg then took the stage and talked the court cases that seemed “popular” in Gelligaer around 1600. Essentially the cases were the result of “bad blood” between two families; the Prichards of Llancaiach Fawr and the Edmund William Lewys family of Gilfach Fargoed Fawr, not only the families but their servants were involved in the feuding. The reasons for the feud may well have been lost in the mists of time but Greg was able to come up with some explanations and needless to say the relationship between a male of one family and a female of the other seemed to be the underlying cause.

It is fortunate we have members who can give talks at such short notice.

#### February 2010 Darren Pit explosion by Judith Jones

Judith, a long time member of the society told us of the Darren Pit explosion of October 29th 1909. The topic was a departure from what we have come to expect from Judith who must be one of the most knowledgeable persons on the history of Gelligaer Common. However it soon became clear that Judith had done a lot of research on her “new” interest. She started by giving a general background to the causes and effects of underground explosions in the mines and the regulations that were brought in to try and improve the safety of the workers. But this did not prevent a number of appalling accidents taking place.

In 1909 the Rhymney Iron and Coal Company owned the Darren Pit, it also owned the nearby Groesfaen pit, but there was no underground link. The Gilfach pit, some miles away and south of Bargoed, did however have a link to the Darren pit. 44 men were working underground trying to clear a rock fall before the morning shift arrived; there was an explosion and the cage was blown up the pit shaft. The alarm was raised but at first no one recognised there was a problem with gas. Sixteen workers escaped by walking to the Gilfach pit. There were many valiant attempts to rescue the other workers but the presence of gas hindered these. Eventually the pit was properly ventilated thus enabling the bodies to be removed. There were twenty six bodies including five rescuers.

It was reported that 20,000 people turned out to watch a funeral cortege that travelled from Deri to Gelligaer. Afterwards the Coroner criticised the lack of rescue equipment but it was found that the only possible cause of the explosion was the use of explosives to clear the blocked underground roadway.

The Darren pit closed in September 1919. This was a particularly poignant talk and a good reminder of the dangerous working conditions in the mines; it also however brought out the terrific community spirit and loyalty in the mining industry.

#### April 2009 Defunct Industrial Equipment and Antique Trinkets

On 28th April, 2010, we went to our monthly meeting with high expectations of an interesting talk by Ceri Thompson, a knowledgeable and entertaining speaker, on some of the artefacts on display at Big Pit Museum where he is Curator.

As a preliminary, Ceri told us a little about his background in mining, his subsequent studies and how he became Curator. He explained the establishment

of Big Pit before it became the Mining Museum and said that due to financial difficulties, it was a relief when it came under the jurisdiction of the National Museum of Wales and thus, the National Mining Museum. He spoke about developments at Big Pit said how proud all employees were when the museum was awarded – against all odds – the Gulbenkian Prize.

He then introduced the alternative subject of his talk. He is responsible for “Glo” (Coal) Magazine. He brought a few issues for us to examine later and then proceeded to read and quote from them. He told us about the experiences of the foreign workers who came to the Coalfield after 1945 and the difficulties some faced. He quoted from articles written by men and women who were involved or had remembrances of the 1984 strike. He also told us about the men and women who are the “other” mineworkers like nurses and photographers. Being Ceri’s style, some of the interest and entertainment came from good humoured and entertaining interaction with the audience!

It had not been what we expected but we were not disappointed at attending such an interesting and entertaining evening. *Audrey Griffiths*

### Timeteam at Llancaiach



In July TimeTeam, the Chanel 4 Archaeology program came to Llancaiach fawr. It was a low key affair but some of our members did get the chance to visit the dig with members of the Friends of Llancaiach. What did they find? I’m afraid we will all have to wait till the programme comes out –probably sometime in the new year. We will keep you informed.

There is more digging in September this time Cardiff University

*Deadline for pieces for next issue 30th October*