



Gelligaer Times

Newsletter of the Gelligaer Historical Society

No 22

www.gelligaerhistoricalsociety.co.uk

Autumn 2011

Hot off the Press

Bargoed and Gilfach A local history has just been delivered to us by the printers. It is a 336 page hardback book about 165mm by 250mm (6½in by 10in). It is being launched at Lewis School, Pengam on Tuesday 22nd November. The book will be available from 6.30am onwards.

The formal part of the evening will start at 7 pm with some Traditional Welsh Folk Dancing performed by Park Primary School. Councillor Harry Andrews MBE will then officially launch the book after which there will be music, possibly less traditional, performed by some of the boys of Lewis School. After Tea/Coffee and Welsh cakes will be available and you will be able to chat to others about Bargoed and Gilfach if you wish.

All are Welcome and the book will be on sale for £10

Members of Gelligaer Historical Society will also be at Bargoed's new library at Hanbury Chapel in the centre of Bargoed on Wednesday morning 23rd November from 10 am to 11 am and on Thursday afternoon from 2 pm to 3 pm. The book will also be available at our monthly talks.

If those times are not convenient please contact us through our website www.gelligaerhistoricalsociety.co.uk or phone on 01443 813122.

A message from the Chair

By the time you read this, Gelligaer Historical Society will be some months into its Golden Jubilee session. In addition to its monthly meetings the Society has held a service of thanksgiving in Gelligaer Parish Church as well as a dinner and conference in Llancaiach Fawr.

The Society was formed after the publication of *The Gelligaer Story*, the first attempt to write a continuous history of Gelligaer parish. Over the five decades since the Society was formed, members have been undertaking the *wider research efforts so as to provide the basis of a fuller and more comprehensive history of Gelligaer* that E. John Saunders, first president of Gelligaer Historical Society, wrote about in volume 1 of the Society's transactions. Since November 2008 members and friends have focussed on the history of Bargoed and Gilfach, the largest urban area within the former Gelligaer parish, and the book containing the results of that research will be launched on 22 November 2011, exactly fifty years after the Society was formally inaugurated.

Annie

Program of Talks for 2011-2012

Monthly Talks – as this is the 50th Anniversary of the founding of the Society we have tried to have as many local talks as possible)

November 30 2011 Gareth Salway Penallta Colliery

(Gareth Salway is the author of the book "Penallta, A Pit and its People")

(The Gelligaer Historical Society was begun in November 1961 so this meeting will be the 50th Anniversary and will include a Birthday Cake)

December 14 2011 An Open Evening Come along and bring any old photographs or old heirloom that relates to any of the communities or farms within the old parish of Gelligaer. Nesta Jones will give a short (5-10 minutes) talk on growing up in Hengoed in the 1930s. Dr David Williams will also give a short talk

January 25 2012 Dr Elin Jones Women in Rhymney Valley

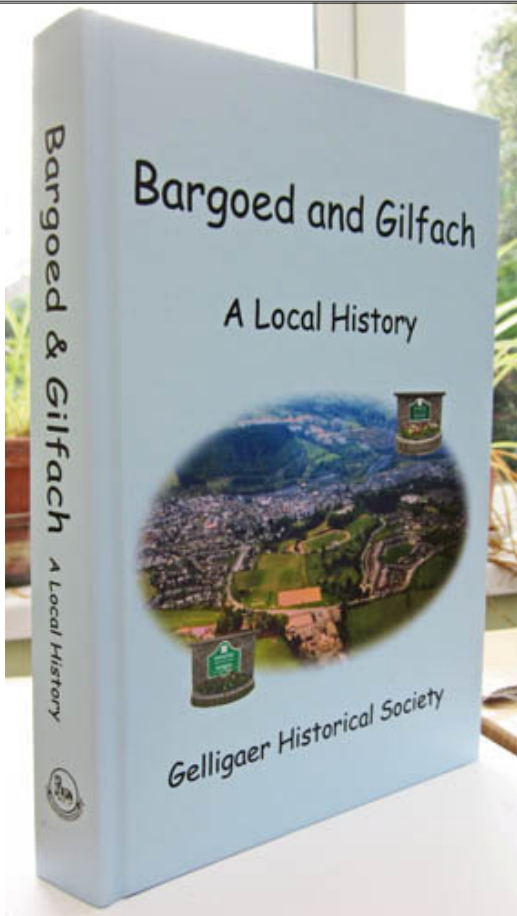
February 29 2012 Darren Valley Ogilvie Project

March 28 2012 Greg Buick Hamlet of Brithdir - Pre-1840

April 25 2012 Terry McCarthy Railways in Gelligaer Parish

October 26 2011 Judith Jones Gelligaer and Merthyr Common

June 27 2012 AGM plus a short talk on Witchcraft in the area by Ken Reynolds



Open Doors 2011

Did you go through any of the *Open Doors* in September 2011? Organised by the Civic Trust for Wales, it is advertised as Wales's biggest celebration of architecture and heritage.

I visited Vaynor Church in the Taf Fechan valley.

The original ninth century Vaynor Parish Church, a wooden structure, was burned down during the Battle of Maesyvaynor, and a new modest stone structure was probably built before the end of the thirteenth century. By 1867 the building was so dilapidated and unsafe that the Rector and churchwardens decided to build a new church. Parishioners were loath to leave the old site but £700 was quickly subscribed and arrangements made to build a new church. Robert Thompson Crawshay's offer to build the new church if the subscriptions collected were handed over towards a new church at Cefn Coed was confirmed in a letter of 3 September 1884 from his son William T. Crawshay to the Rector of Vaynor. Bishop Thirlwall granted a licence to hold divine services and administer the Sacraments at the National Schoolroom in Pontsticill so services were held there while the new church was being built. The latter was completed 29 May 1869 at a cost of £1,368 but it was not on the same site as the old church. Dr Thirlwall, Lord Bishop of St Davids, was ill and so it was consecrated and opened by Dr Ollivant, Lord Bishop of Llandaff, 1 June 1870. The morning sermon (Luke VII⁵) was preached by Venerable Richard William Payne Davies and the afternoon sermon (Corinthians V⁵) was given by Revd Canon Evans, Vicar of Rhymney, in the open air and *not far from the east side of the Tower was a thousand people before him*. Revd David Parry (*Llywel*) preached the evening sermon (Colossians I²⁸).



The photograph on the left (taken from *Vaynor and Penderyn Rural District Official Guide*, probably published in the 1960s) shows the old (in the foreground) and the new Vaynor Churches with *Church Tavern* on the left and the new graveyard beyond the new Parish Church.

The spire, modified in the 1960s when a slate roof was added to keep out the rainwater is shown in the drawing on the right. Many people are aware of some of the interesting tombstones in Vaynor churchyard (including that of Robert Thompson



Crawshay) but the fact that, over the centuries, Vaynor Parish has been served by some

eminent clergymen is not so widely known. One such clergyman was Rev Jabez Edmund Jenkins who was curate before serving two decades as Rector. There is a memorial plaque inside the church to him and his wife Ruth (Ellen Prydain) and he was buried in the churchyard. In his native Monmouthshire he was a bardic pupil of *Islwyn* and he gained a reputation as an able and eminent Welsh scholar, known as *Creidiol* among the Welsh literati and Gorsedd. His *Vaynor, its History and Guide* was published in 1897 and he edited several publications for the Church.

Annie

Opening Doors, looking at Windows.

Driving past the church of St Margaret of Antioch in Roath and you could be forgiven for thinking it was the typical 'Victorian Gothic' style favoured by our ancestors before people realised that current trends in architecture were acceptable for places of worship. During the Open Doors Project, part of European Heritage Weekends, in 2011, many church buildings opened their doors to visitors interested in history and architecture, presenting guided tours and offering afternoon tea. Although Roath is a bit off my beaten track, I considered it worthwhile to take myself to Cardiff, to visit Saint Margaret's. It is just off Newport Road, near Roath Court, and there I spent a pleasant hour on the guided tour.

Although it is true that the current building only dates from 1870, there has been a place of Christian worship at the site for around 900 years; the land formerly belonging to Tewksbury Abbey. The Dissolution of the Monasteries resulted in a change of ownership of the land and a decline of many religious foundations and buildings.

Jumping ahead to the 19th century, the 1st Marquis of Bute, one of the prime movers in the development of Cardiff, built a family mausoleum on the site in 1800 and his great grandson rebuilt the church in 1870, designed by architect John Prichard. The original plan was to build the church using different colour stones in bands and have only plain glass in the windows. Over the years, many highly coloured stained glass windows have been added, which certainly brighten up the rather gloomy interior. Many show scenes from the New Testament and a later one shows a modern, 'Technicolor' Saint Margaret defeating the dragon.

As it was raining, I passed on the trip up the tower and as I am not too keen on cellars, I skipped the Bute Mausoleum too. Here, six members of the Bute family were buried in their pink granite tombs up until the family converted to Roman Catholicism.

The church registers are also displayed in the mausoleum. If you are passing, Saint Margaret's is well worth a look but access to the mausoleum is limited. *Iris Owens*

Autumn Conference Report 15th September 2011

Vice chair- Judith Jones opened the conference and welcomed members, guests and speakers to the event.

The first talk by Louise Mumford was on the Llan-gors textile- a piece of fine, richly embroidered cloth found at the cranog at Llangors Lake. During the excavations, which took place between 1989 and 1993, dendro-chronology of

wooden piles sunk into the lake bed revealed that the site dated from the late 9th century and was a man-made island built out over the lake. The site was only used for a short period before being destroyed by fire. The royal princes of Bryncheiniog were linked to the site and there were also connections with Ireland. Time Team fans may well have seen one of their programmes on this site.

The waterlogged site preserved both wood and textile by excluding air from the ancient material. The talk focused on a piece of textile which probably belonged to a lady of high status. This conclusion was reached based on the high quality of the materials used and the intense amount of skilled labour involved in its production. It was due to the fact that some of the textile had been burned which had helped it to survive the acid conditions of the lake. Electron microscopes revealed the structure of the fabric: linen, embroidered with silken and other threads, woven into the backing cloth in patterns showing lions and ducks. It was probably made up into an outer garment- a tunic worn over another piece of clothing. The talk was illustrated with examples of woven and dyed material which conference delegates were able to examine as they asked questions about the significance of the textile its possible uses and its future.

The second talk was entitled Contemptible Foes and Scoundrels- Chartism's Enemies.

There are few people interested in History who do not know of the Chartists- especially here in South Wales- the story of John Frost and the Newport Rising is part of our local culture. Professor Chris Williams gave us an altogether different slant on the story, focusing on a neglected aspect: those who opposed Chartism and why. One of the most surprising discoveries was that almost all religious denominations opposed Chartism, though many of the clergy opposed slavery.

Many of the enfranchised, usually land owners, who were moderately well educated, simply believed that the working classes were not adequately educated and would not be able to make value judgements if given the vote. Another reason for opposing Chartism was based on the premise that by not owning property, working people had no stake in society. The Law, after all was based around material precepts (as The West Mon. Association of the Preservation of Life and Property attested to) not rights. It was the fact that the Chartists took up arms that caused many people who would otherwise have endorsed their aims, to oppose them. The press had a field day depicting middle class women and children being terrorised by Chartists during the march on Newport. This fresh approach to a familiar subject was very refreshing.

After lunch Dr Maddy Gray took the floor to tell us about how tourists to Wales in the 18th century perceived the changes brought about by industrialisation. Many were keen painters who were as keen to show the furnaces which lit up the countryside in dramatic starkness mirroring how ruined abbeys had enlightened the past. The nobility came to Wales with their easels and paint boxes as did the clergy. They loved the juxtaposition of rural tranquillity and industrial dynamism which they transferred to canvas. Even the industrial artisans were allowed to make an appearance, where formally only nobility or rural peasants were considered suitable subjects for pictures. There were however links with the classical past of both writing and art which the painters retained and which they deemed gave their work 'added value'.

The hidden treasures of a 'coal cwtch' were the source documents for David Maddox exposition of the Tonypany Riots. Hidden for years under small coal and dust, glass plated slides from 1905 had come to light in a back yard in south Wales in the 1960s. The slides documented the rise in population in Tonypany and the vibrant, bustling social, sporting and cultural life in the villages around the Glamorgan Colliery. We saw how the lives of miners in Wattstown, Clydach Vale and Llwynypia were changed by the tragedies of the pit disasters in the area.

After 100 years of obscurity the slides taken by Levi Ladd showed the drama of the Tonypany riots of 1910. The negotiations, (or lack of them), the role of Mabon the eminent Union leader, lock-outs, strikes, blacklegs and the resultant recriminations, poverty, starvation and destitution were all part of the complex tapestry which culminated in full scale riots and police and military intervention. Although the miners never made good the wages lost through the strikes they nevertheless achieved their objective of a minimum wage within a year of their return to work. The slides opened a new window on the history of this period.

To end the conference Dr Stephanie Ward gave a talk based on her research in south Wales and the North East of England

Marriage and Family in South Wales and the North-East of England in the Era of the Great Depression by Dr. Stephanie Ward.

Dr Ward, introduced as a "Young South Walian", quoted Gwyn Thomas who had written of the terraced houses and love, both of "which keep people warm" and had influenced her research into loving partnerships. The attitude to marriage in the late 20th century and early 21st emphasized the "individuality" of the partnership so she was prompted to investigate the inter-war years.

She had looked at two geographical areas which had suffered economic collapse. Both South Wales and North East England had similar levels of unemployment at 80% and there were common factors in the dynamics of family organisation. The traditional nuclear family was man, woman and three children; the extended families lived in close proximity; many households took in lodgers, accepted as "uncles". Man was the head of the household and women

ceased working upon marriage even before the arrival of children. For a boy, the rite of passage was work first, then marriage; for a girl it was just marriage. Independence was expressed by entering into marriage but getting married “on the dole” was considered a stigma. During Stephanie’s research, she interviewed women who were young during the thirties and was told that “if a boy asked you to dance, you first asked him if he had a job”.

Parents disapproved of unemployed suitors for their daughters. Men were expected to take the lead in courting and to pay for everything so young women went to great lengths to be attractive. Examples were rubbing the red distemper off walls to be used as rouge on lips and cheeks and boiling onion skins to provide a yellow dye for hair. The “monkey parade” was common – the girls walked around the town, the boys watched and chose from the sidelines but girls were watched over fiercely by their mothers especially in the North-East.

The introduction of the hated means test resulted in a “disinherited youth” unable to follow the normality of courtship, marriage and children so many young men left their homes to find work and then returned to fetch their girls. This caused changes in the traditional set-up of extended families helping to care for children, resulting in tensions particularly when the men became involved in political protests and the young mothers felt isolated.

The “family” means test saw many heads of households becoming dependent on working children to provide income for the whole family. This was a matter of great shame to fathers and upset the traditional hierarchy of life especially if the girls were the wage earners. Tensions arose and family life again broke down when the young left to work away.

As a result of her research, Dr Ward questioned whether the current belief that there had been “a golden age of families in the past” was valid, though the commonality of poverty frequently saw neighbours helping during times of stress. For those of us who remembered stories told by our parents, her paper had raised many memories and for those who had not, it had been thought-provoking. We acknowledged her findings with enthusiastic applause.

Other Events

Our 50th Birthday year got off to a good start with a Service of Thanksgiving for the success of the Gelligaer Historical Society at Saint Catwg’s Church Gelligaer in late September. Hymns included ‘Lord for the years’, ‘O God our help in ages past’, ‘Dear Lord and father of mankind’ and ‘Lord of all hopefulness’. There were readings from the Old and New Testament in English and Welsh. Annie Owen gave a short, illustrated talk on the achievements of the society.

The society’s programme opened with a talk entitled ‘Coal to Dole’ about the demise and re-generation of the Taf-Bargoed Valley in September, followed smartly in October with our Golden Jubilee Dinner and the Autumn Conference, both at Llancaiach Fawr. Hardly time to catch one’s breath before Brian Davies’s talk on Dr Griffiths’ Tramroad at the end of October. November sees both a talk on Penallta Colliery and the launch of our Book - Bargoed and Gilfach A Local History. Do come to the launch on Tuesday 22nd November at Lewis (Boys) School- it should be a good evening.

Everyone seems to approve of our new 7.00p.m start time and spending a little more time chatting and socialising after the talk.

Recent talks enjoyed by members:

October 27th 2011

Brian Davies on Dr. Richard Griffiths’ tram-road (dram-road)

Once again members and visitors were entertained by Brian Davies’ own style of delivery of his talks, supplemented by an excellent slide show. Brian explained that although Doctor Griffiths, born 1756 died 1825, was a medical man he was also a shrewd business man and a gambler .One I story involves Doctor Griffiths betting in a snail race and using some dubious tactics to ensure his snail was a winner. Whether or not this is true is not known but his gambling exploits are recorded, one of which ended up in court. The Doctor had the foresight to realise there was money to be made from coal in the Rhondda Volleys but he hit on the idea that it was just as lucrative to own the tram-road upon which the coal was brought down the valley rather than extract the coal himself. He took out a mineral lease from his brother-in law but never worked the coal himself. He sub-let the rights to Jeremiah Homfray and made quite an amount of money on that deal alone. Brian’s view is that the opening of the tram-road really created the market town at Pontypridd. Families soon realised the empty tram (or in South Wales the dram) was a useful means of getting back up the valley with their shopping , albeit a dusty experience.

Because this was a talk to the Gelligaer Historical Society Brian slightly altered his usual talk to explain a bit more about the links between Dr. Griffiths and the Thomas family who originated from Llanbradach Fawr and Ystrad Fawr. Basically by marriage the Thomas family inherited the vast majority of Dr. Griffiths’ estate; which added to their existing wealth.

Brian used the slides to show what he has discovered thus far. The starting point of the tram-road was shown and various points along its route until it reached the canal. Some slides showed how a walker can still get onto what was the tram-road. The talk finished with some slides showing how a tram was excavated and put back into running order. Brian concluded the talk with the story of Dr.Griffiths’ funeral, which the Doctor had arranged himself. He left instructions that his coffin was to be carried from Pontypridd to Llanwonno, quite a distance away and involving a few steep hills. Ever the practical joker he also apparently named the men he wanted to be his bearers, one was said to be disabled. The bearers soon fell by the way-side but there were so many people along the route or walking in the cortege that as soon as one fell away another immediately replaced him.

Publications

The Gelligaer Historical Society has published a journal since its inception. We would like to produce a small journal annually and would welcome any article you may have relating to the history of the parish or the communities within it. We don't say we will publish it and we will certainly not pay any money for it. Any piece can be from 1 to 10 pages (400 to 4000 words), although preferably not too long. If you have such an article then email it in Word or similar format to: webmaster@gelligaerhistoricalsociety.co.uk

Gelligaer Journal 2010 Volume XVIII	£4	£1.00 post & packaging.
Gelligaer Journal 2009 Volume XVII	£5	£1.50 post & packaging.
Gelligaer Journal 2007 Volume XVI	£3.50	£1.00 post & packaging
Gelligaer Journal 2005 Volume XV	£4	£1.00 post & packaging
Gelligaer Journal Volumes Vol XI – XV in 1 volume	£5	£2.00 post & packaging.
Gelligaer Journal Volumes Vol VI – X in 1 volume	£5	£2.00 post & packaging.
The single volume collections were kindly produced for the society by Dr. Fred Holley		
Gelligaer Farms & Families 1540-1840 - Garthgynydd Hamlet	£5	£1.00 post & packaging
Gelligaer Farms & Families 1540-1840 - Brithdir Hamlet	£7	£1.50 post & packaging

All publications are available at our monthly talks with no postage

Deadline for pieces for Issue 23 of Gelligaer Historical Society Newsletter - 26th January 2012