



GELLIGAER TIMES—number 73 August 2024

The newsletter of the Gelligaer Historical Society

Editor's note

In the past I have tried to come up with some details of the numbers used to distinguish the newsletters, oftentimes there are several interesting “facts”. However, this time I am limiting myself to announcing that: -

In a game of bingo seventy-three can be called as:

Queen Bee or under the tree (Rhyming)

Lucky 3 (the number seven is considered to be a lucky number in some countries)

On a more sombre note; seventy-three seconds was the time it took for the space shuttle Challenger to explode after it was launched

Readers may already be aware that Caerphilly County Borough Council have proposed to mothball two heritage buildings, The Miner's Institute at Blackwood and Llancaiach Fawr Manor House, whilst it considers other ways of keeping those premises open. They assert this has to be done because of financial pressures on the Council's finances. A public consultation is underway, please go to the following link:

<https://conversation.caerphilly.gov.uk/blackwood-miners-institute-and-llancaiach-fawr>

<https://trafodaeth.caerphilly.gov.uk/sefydliad-y-glowyr-coed-duon-ac-llancaiach-fawr>

Over the years this Society, along with other community organisations, has developed a good working relationship with those employed at Llancaiach Fawr. It has been the Society's venue for its monthly meetings for several years. It is fair to say the venue has been one of the factors in helping the Society not only increase membership but also to help the Society to become well known and respected in sphere of local history. Additionally, the venue has hosted the Society's annual conference which has become the “go to” event amongst history societies and individuals who are interested in the history of south east Wales.

David Mills

In this edition you will find: -

Report from the chair-AGM

Evening tour of the church at Bedwellty

GHS Facebook

Old(Ish) photographs

Reports on monthly meetings-speakers Roy Smith and Lyn Pask

New publication

Photos from other Facebook groups

Programme of meetings 2024-2025

Report from the chair of the Society - GHS Annual General Meeting

Following a successful year, the Society held its AGM at Llancaiach Fawr on Wednesday, 26 June 2024. Despite the late start because of traffic lights and road works between Gelligaer and Llancaiach Fawr entrance, the meeting ended in plenty of time for tea and coffee before hearing a fascinating and very informative talk by our treasurer, Roy Smith, on the topic *The Battle of Jutland "Memorial Park" bringing History to the Surface*, a report by Ann Pinch appears later in this newsletter Once again, I want to thank everyone who attended at Llancaiach or via Zoom, for supporting the officers and committee members in 2023-24 and for endorsing their ability to run the society during the coming year. I very much hope that this will not prove to be the last AGM that GHS holds at Llancaiach Fawr.

I am reminding you of the names of those you appointed as officers and committee members this year and the “jobs” for which they, and others, have volunteered. From a personal point of view, I am very pleasantly surprised, and very grateful that we continue to have members coming forward to volunteer to help with the organisation.

Officers:

- Judith Jones – Chairman and Programme secretary
- David Mills Vice - chairman and editor of *Gelligaer Times*
- Roy Smith - Treasurer
- Greg Buick - Webmaster
- Brian Jarrett – Publicity officer

Committee members:

- Clive Andrewartha - Watching brief re Gelligaer Fort, Village and Capel Horeb
- Kathryn Benson - Organises our conference
- Sandy Halliday - Technical support at meetings and will organise our next journal for printing
- Ann Pinch and Susan Price - Tea/coffee at meetings and manage sales outlets of journals in Ystrad Mynach, Bargoed and Nelson libraries
- Ann Pinch - writes up monthly talks for the newsletters
- Susan Price - Minute Secretary
- Ian Williams
- Kate Wynne

Other volunteers

- James Benson - Technical support at meetings
- Enfys Hawthorn - helps the treasurer when she is able to and as required
- David Mills, Greg Buick and Sandy Halliday - Peoples' Collection Wales co-ordinators
- Leighton Smart – GHS Facebook administrator

Judith

Evening tour of Bedwellty Church and Graveyard

Thank you to David Mills for organising a very successful evening event for us at St. Sannan's Church, Bedwellty on Wednesday 14th August. Several GHS members joined many other attendees who had turned up to listen to David's talk in the church when he spoke about the fabric of the building and pointed out various features such as the old parish chest. When he turned his attention to the wall plaques, David told us a little about the families, mainly local landowners, who were commemorated there, emphasising some connections with Gelligaer Parish. The Williams family of Maesruddud, for example whose link started in 1779 when William Williams married Alice Llewelyn and went to live at her home, Garth Gynydd Farm at Bedlinog; also, Baptist minister, Charles Winter from Tynewydd Farm Bedwellty, who had links with that village, when he and his followers started an Arminian Baptist cause when preaching at Salem (The Graig), near Bedlinog.

During a break in his talk, David conducted a tour of the graveyard - under a blue sky, in sunshine and no rain! He stood at a viewpoint describing other churches and visible landscape features as far north as the Brecon Beacons before directing our attention to the small memorial stones lined against a wall, many Irish people, Catholics, buried on the north side of the Church. While chatting at the end, David and I were trying to agree on how many years have passed since I first went to listen to him speak at the Church, and agreed that it must be well over thirty. Where have the years gone?

We send our thanks to Corinne Robertson, Church Warden, who ensured the building was open and also helped other parishioners providing refreshments, including her home baked sponge! And thank you again, David, and we look forward to your next talk!

GHS member Ceri Crefield has kindly agreed to some of the photographs she took at the Bedwellty visit being displayed in this newsletter, they appear below.

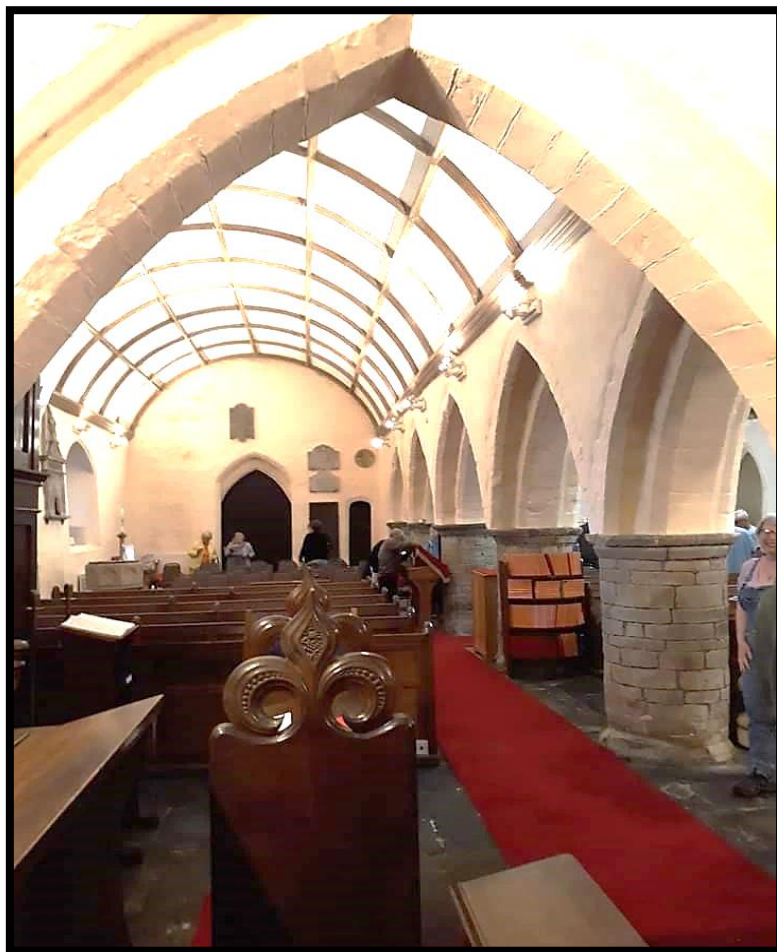
Judith Jones



The North Nave



Looking out from the Chancel into the North Nave



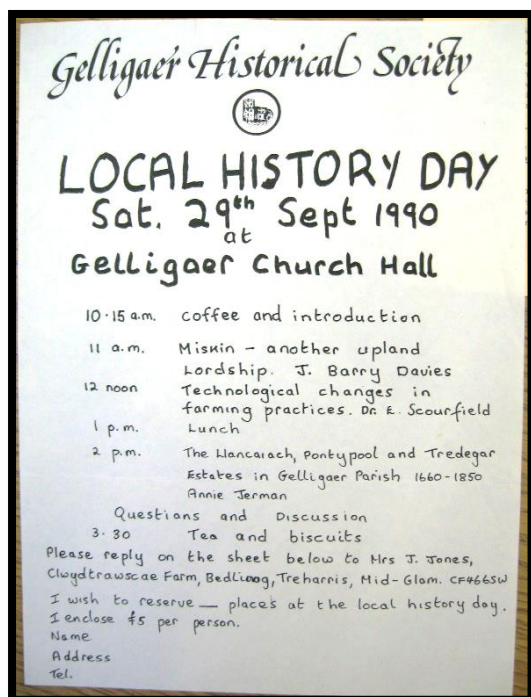
The South Nave

GHS Facebook

Although this has been in existence for some years within the last year it has “taken off” mainly thanks to the efforts of GHS member Leighton Smart who has taken on the role of Administrator. As at 20th July 2024 it had 485 followers. However, on 21st August 2024, just as I was finalizing the draft newsletter, we reached 500 followers. I had doubts about using Facebook, especially as I noticed some inane comments on some of the groups, but in my opinion the benefits outweigh those pointless and sometimes hurtful comments-just ignore them.

A number of history groups now operate on Facebook and it is a good way of seeing what others are doing. Old photographs are a regular feature with a useful facility allowing comments to be added. There are a number of photographs on the GHS page and a sample appear below. I would like to thank Annie Owen who posted a large number of photographs over the years including the one of Bargoed Grammar School rugby team which appears below; I also thank Judith Jones and Menna Hughes for identifying the boys in the rugby team. Followers of our group have posted queries which have led, and will continue to lead to, a record being kept of events, personalities and other matters of interest which fall within the purview of the society.

If you are not a follower then I urge you do join. If like me you are not particularly adept at modern technology or have doubts about what goes on then there is always some who can assist or reassure you



On the left is the forerunner of the Society’s annual conference, still going strong some thirty four years later. On the right is the Lewis school, Gelligaer, demolished several years ago-the site now contains an information board..

Bargoed Grammar School sevens rugby team



Back row on the extreme left is Dr Whitney Jones and on the right W. H. Davies (Headmaster), both of whom were members of GHS and who contributed articles in our journal over the years. The other member of staff, second from the left, is Glyn Phillips.

Holding the ball, and presumably the captain, is Brian Price born in Deri in 1937. He went on to play for Newport RFC, the Barbarians, Wales (first cap in 1961) and toured with the British Lions to Australia and New Zealand in 1966. He died in December 2023. Others pupils in the photograph are:

Back row- left to right Malcolm Owen, Max Davies and David Davies

Front row-left to right Raysen Pinch, Alan Thomas, Lindsey Harris, Ralph James.

With the exceptions of Alan Thomas, who lived in Fochriw, Max Davies and David Davies the other pupils are “Deri boys”. Alan Thomas, known as Algy, was born in London to a Welsh father who was described as a circus boxer. The family were evacuated during the blitz. Algy played for several first-class rugby clubs, eventually settling at Newport RFC, playing 213 games before retiring. He was awarded two Welsh caps, the first one following his display when playing for Newport against the New Zealand All Blacks. Newport won 3 points to nil. It was another Deri boy, John (Dicky) Uzzell, who scored the only points of the game.

David Mills

Old (Ish) photographs

GHS member Brian Jarrett has been trawling through his collection of photographs that he took during his (long!) career as a professional photographer. He has kindly submitted the two photographs below which have not been published before. They record the sad event of the demolition of Lewis School for Girls. Brian attended the site to record the demolition because a time capsule had been buried within the foundations when the building was being erected, however water had penetrated the capsule affecting the contents. If any reader can shed some light on what was contained in the capsule, then please get in touch.

Thank you, Brian-keep, them coming.





Monthly Talks reports by Ann Pinch

Wednesday June 26th

The Battle of Jutland Memorial Park-Bringing History to the Surface

Roy Smith

Researching The Battle of Jutland, Roy found the name *George Alfred Rivers* and had his link with Wales and the Rhymney Valley. The family, originally from Bristol, moved to South Wales in the latter part of the 19th century- Alfred was born in 1893 in Rhymney. He joined the navy and was a sailor on the Battle Cruiser HMS Indefatigable which was one of the first ships to be sunk in The Battle of Jutland in 1916 when he was just 23!

Not much was known about the ships sunk in the battle until Gert Norman Andersen - a marine explorer who spent some 40 years searching the North Sea for wrecks- was given permission to locate and identify the wrecks- '*bringing the battle to the surface*'. He was joined by Dr Innes McCartney- a British nautical archaeologist and historian- and from 2001 onwards their team discovered, surveyed and interpreted a number of the wrecked ships including the Indefatigable, the Defence and the Nomad. Interesting slides were shown which helped to plot the position and depth of the ships. One being found to have been blown apart, one half being found four miles away from the other. During 2015 the divers made another survey -this time using the new EIVA Multibeam System. A new member of the team included N Jellicoe ,the grandson of Admiral Jellicoe, and his input provided new charts and information which helped the exploration. The HMS Warrior was the last ship to be surveyed- in 2017- and this was the one found to be in the best condition. Mention was made of the controversy concerning the sinking of the ships at the battle and the proportionate of blame to causes and individuals much of which was kept secret until the 1920s'

In 2017 Roy visited the Memorial to the Battle of Jutland. This is in a Memorial Garden in the Danish Sea War Museum in Jutland on the west coast of Denmark close to the site of the battle and was opened in 2016. It was envisaged by G N Andersen and the actual design was created by a sculpture named P H Cerderdorff. Twenty-five 3.5m high stone obelisks- carved to look like the prow of a ship - each one representing a British and German ship sunk during the battle. Number twenty-six was added to commemorate more than 600 who died on other ships which survived the battle. In addition, 12m high figures -each one representing a sailor killed- are to be placed around the stone obelisks ,8645 in all. Despite such heavy losses the naval battle confirmed the British naval dominance allowing the Britain to continue the maritime blockade which contributed to Germany’s eventual defeat.

This talk was appreciated by all who attended enjoying Roy’s research and the slides which enhanced the evening and fostering an interest in the historical Battle of Jutland. The speed of the ships from being hit to the minutes it took to sink must have been frightening -so many lives lost so quickly, so few survivors.

Wednesday 19th May 2024

Steam- pies, coffee, ice-cream from Bardi to Blackwood

Lyn Pask

This evening Mr Pask entertained us with the story of the migration of the Blackwood café owners from their home town of Bardi -a town in a mountainous area of Italy near Bologna-to the valleys of South Wales in the early 19th century. After spending some time in London, they moved west to Newport and then north throughout the valleys selling, mostly ice-cream, from their carts. Ice-cream which sold extremely well! The growth of the Italian Café industry followed as these Italian families established their numerous cafes in South Wales, and these families helped Mr Pask with his research. Despite having lived in Britain for about four decades WW2 saw many of these Welsh Italians interred – some put on the Andora Star to be taken to Canada for the duration of the war. Unfortunately, the ship was sunk and 468 of these immigrants drowned.

After the war the Italians further developed their cafes and their homemade ice-creams, steam pies and of course delicious coffees proved very popular. Some of those present recalled the discussions, even competitions, to decide which café sold the best ice-cream. Further development saw the Minoli family branching out into betting shops- again making this a successful business, shop after shop being opened in the different valley villages; later using their skills to diversify when affected by ‘night racing’, moving the business into public houses. The onset of the Internet closed many betting shops and now there are only three remaining in the valley-one of those being the Minoli Betting Shop in Pontlottyn. Not just the betting shops suffered when people changed their shopping habits, towns and villages have altered, shops closed- including-sadly, the famous Italian Cafes. Not one remains in Blackwood whilst Bargoed has just two.

Welsh Italians, whilst integrating into the Welsh culture, retain strong links with their home town of Bardi indeed there was a chapel built in a cemetery there to remember the 48 who went down with the Andora Star and a street there is named Via Andora and a plaque was placed in St. David’s Roman Catholic Metropolitan Cathedral in Cardiff. In conclusion Mr Pask stressed the importance of the Italian Cafes to the Welsh cultural scene with St Fagan’s Museum including a café and artefacts in its museum grounds.

Thank you, Mr Pask, for such an entertaining evening which revived our memories of past times spent with steam-pies, coffee and ice-creams in those Italian Cafes.

New Publication

Peter Rogers has written a new book about Merthyr's boxing tradition:

Brutal Passion - part one.

Bare-knuckle fighting in and around Merthyr 1840 - 1876

Stories and fight reports of local and lesser-known prize-fighters.

£4.99 plus postage of £2.10 second class. For more information, please contact peterrogers2008@hotmail.co.uk

PHOTOGRAPHS FROM OTHER FACEBOOK GROUPS

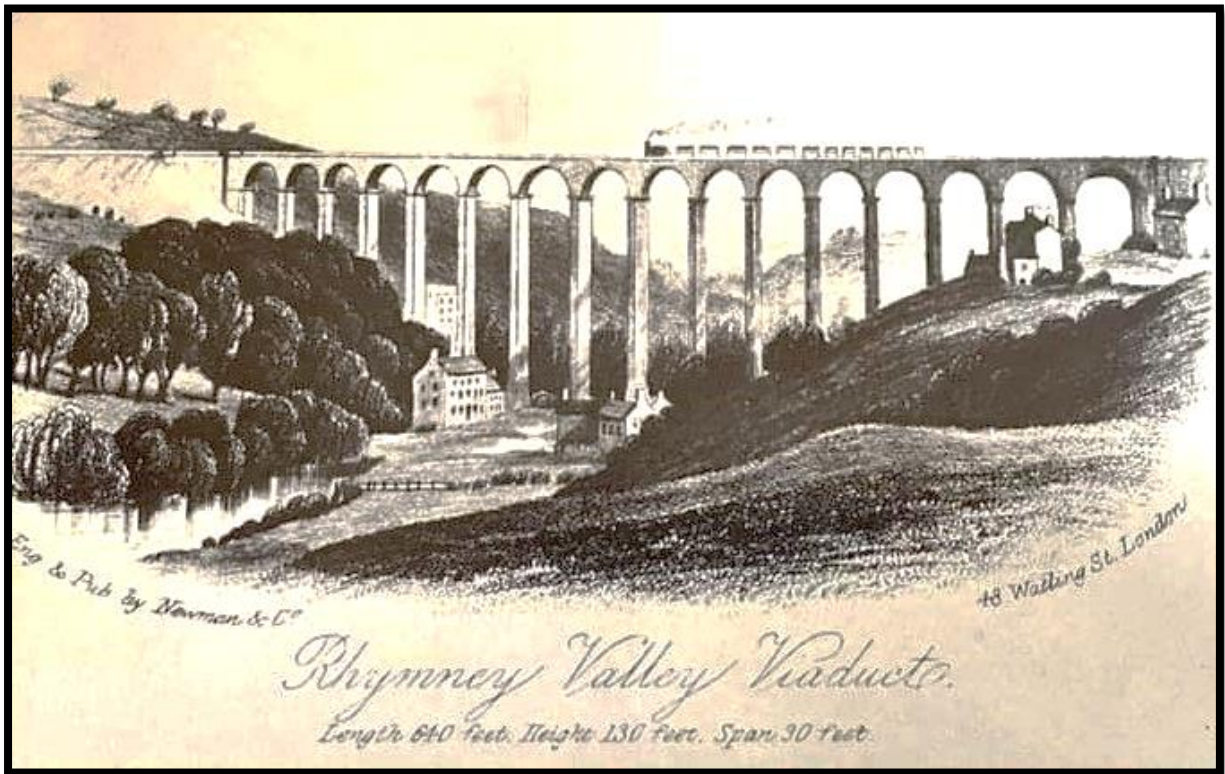
The photographs which appear below appeared on Facebook groups and are just a sample to illustrate what Facebook has to offer to local historians.



The photograph above is NOT from GHS Facebook. It is a group of ladies in Llangeitho, near Tregaron and was taken in 1885, how times have changed! Some wag (not me) added a caption to this photograph "A girl's night out in Llangeitho". Life was certainly a serious business in those days. Llangeitho is a village in Ceredigion, about seven miles north of Lampeter. In 1713

Daniel Rowland was born there. He became the rector of the parish and a well-known preacher, The church is dedicated to St. Ceitho, it was rebuilt in 1819. However, because of particular tenets preached by him he was suspended from the exercise of his pastoral functions. Thereafter he became the founder of a group of followers known as “Rowlandists”, who later became the Calvinistic Methodists.

The next two photographs are of viaducts that were built to enable coal to be transported from the Rhondda, Cynon and Rhymney valleys eastwards towards Hereford and the West Midlands rather than having to take the coal to Cardiff or Newport.



This engraving dates from circa 1860. There is usually a discussion surrounding its name, some say Hengoed viaduct, others say Maesycwmmmer viaduct, I offer no opinion but the engraver has decided to be diplomatic and name it as Rhymney Valley Viaduct.



Crumlin Viaduct opened on 1st June 1857. Testing by the Board of Trade had started in the previous month when an engine driven by a driver known as Mad Jack raced an engine and wagons across the viaduct despite being told to slow down. It was said that Jack visited every pub in Crumlin before he started the test run. The last scheduled passenger train crossed the viaduct on 13th June 1964.



GELLIGAER HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Studying the history and heritage of the area covered by the former Gelligaer parish and Gelligaer Urban District since 1961

PROGRAMME : 2024 – 2025

2024 25 September	David Maddox OBE	Churchill & S. Wales: Hero or Villain?
30 October	Pat Jones-Jenkins	The 400 th anniversary of the building of Ruperra Castle in 1626
27 November	Lisa Tallis	Special Collections at Cardiff University Library
11 December	Stephen K. Jones	Brunel in South Wales Part 1: From Trevithick's tracks to lines of communication
2025 29 January 11.00 a.m. start	Les James	Joan Williams, wife of Zephaniah, and the Dictionary of Welsh Biography
	Lunch can be purchased at Llancaiach Fawr	
	Colin Thomas	Putting Workers on Film
26 February	Roy Smith	Bomber Command and a Caerphilly connection
22 March	Gelligaer Historical Society annual conference	
26 March	Dr. Marion Loeffler	Judicial; Terror: Judge Hardinge and the aftermath of the Merthyr Tydfil Riots of September 1800
30 April	Huw Williams	Artists in the Industrial Landscape
28 May	Alun Burge	Minnie Pallister: Fearless Rebel
25 June	Annual General Meeting and	
	Ben Price	Voices of 1842: Child labour in the South Wales Coalfield

MONTHLY MEETINGS:

WHEN? Last Wednesday of most months (**EXCEPT December [varies] and July and August [no monthly meetings]**)

START TIME? 7.00 p.m. (**EXCEPT January** when it is an 11.00 a.m. start)

WHERE? Llancaiach Fawr (CF46 6ER) and via Zoom

Membership subscription for 2024 - 2025 is £10 (students, £5)

Meetings are open to non-members (£2 contribution to the Society)

FOR FURTHER DETAILS of GHS events, activities and publications please visit:

www.gelligaerhistoricalsociety.co.uk

or follow GHS on Facebook or Twitter

We will be organising summer visits and walks, and those organised to date include: a talk and tour of Bedwellty Church by David Mills and a walk on Gelligaer and Merthyr Common. Everyone attending comes at their own risk.

Subject to sufficient interest, we also propose reviving the practice of Christmas dinners at Llancaiach Fawr.