



GELLIGAER TIMES

DECEMBER 2022 NEWSLETTER NUMBER 66

Editor's Note: In an effort to raise interest I have, in the past, commented on the significance of some of the sequential numbers used to distinguish these newsletters. I now reach the pinnacle of my efforts by pointing out that *clickety click* is the term used by Bingo callers when announcing the number **66**. This will be followed by *Stairway to heaven* - Newsletter **67**.

In this edition you will find:

A message from our Chair, Judith

Short notes on the October and November meetings

GHS elsewhere

A stone with a hole in Gelligaer

“Howlers” from Lewis school, Pengam

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Making our Diamond Jubilee publication

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Travel in the hills by a horse litter

New Publications

Joyful Christmas

David Mills

Nadolig Llawen

Message from our Chair

Thank you everyone, officers, and committee and GHS members, for your support of the Society in our 2022 sessions. It has been very encouraging to see so many people attending meetings both at Llancaiach and on zoom. Many have also come along to our other events which have been held in association with Cardiff Archaeological Society and with Merthyr Tydfil Family History Society; the archaeology walk in Gelligaer and on Gelligaer and Merthyr Common and the Graveyard Recording training. Both events were led by GGAT's Dr. Edith Evans.

In January 2006 GHS chairman, Terry McCarthy, inaugurated and edited *Gelligaer Times*, writing in the first edition,

“The aim of this new venture is to improve communications between the Society, its members and the wider community, including other organisations . . . particularly, but not exclusively, locally. It is hoped that this publication, possibly published quarterly,

will keep the membership and others informed about the Society's activities - meetings, excursions, publications and events."

I hope that members – and others- feel that this aim continues to be realised and I want to take this opportunity to thank David Mills, the current editor, for continuing to produce the newsletter despite his on-going health problems.

I send my best wishes to you for Christmas and for a happy, peaceful and healthy 2023.

Judith

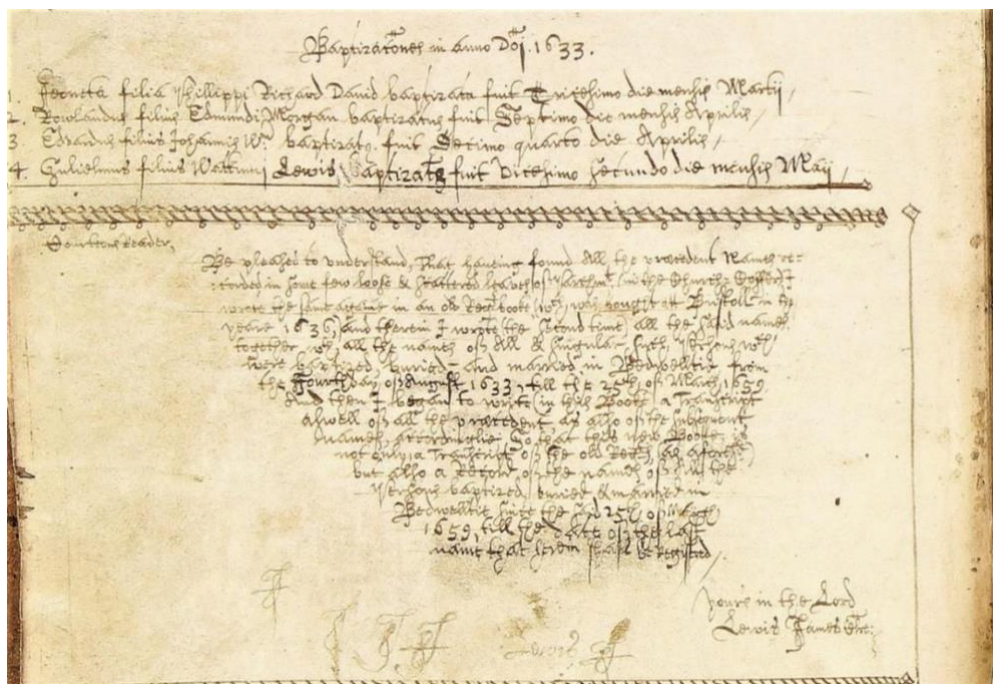
GHS -elsewhere

The Society has been involved in other events. Dr. Elin Jones, Ian Williams and Judith Jones represented the Society at the day of talks at St Woolos Cathedral, part of the Newport Rising Festival in November, and Judith went recently to Ffair Nadolig at Ysgol Gymraeg Penalltau. Both were successful events with opportunities to advertise the Society and its activities – and also to sell some books

October Meeting

After an absence of several years Professor Maddy Gray attended Llancaiach on 28th October 2022 to deliver a fascinating talk about a fascinating man. Lewis James was curate of the parish at Bedwellty from 1635 until his death in 1668, although technically he was deposed from his living during the Protestant interregnum. However, he continued to record all the events that took place during the time he was out of office, which included his own baptisms of children. He started the Bedwellty registers when he was appointed in 1635 and his first task was to transpose some entries that he found on loose pages in the parish chest. Three years after his appointment he noted in the register that the plague visited the parish, that year he buried 109 people and indicated 82 had died of the plague.

An interesting question and answer session took place at the end

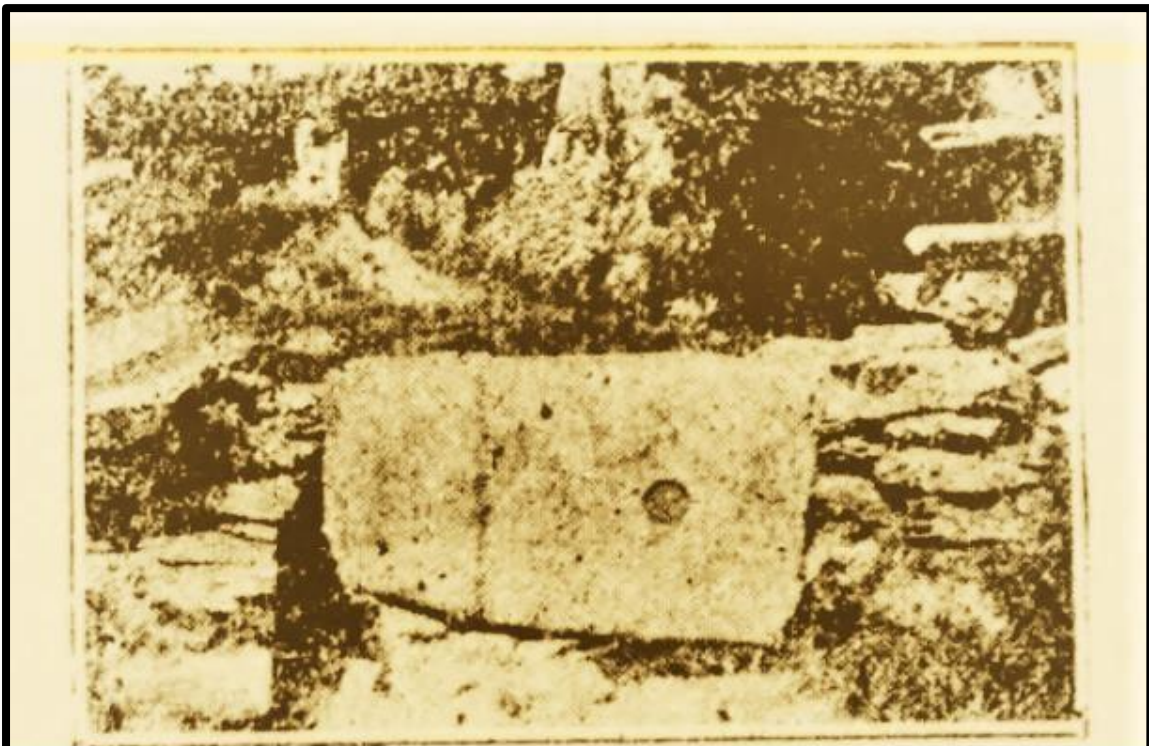


The first page of the register started by Lewis James, courtesy of Gwent Archives

November Meeting

Dr. Daryl Leeworthy spoke to Gelligaer Historical Society in our February 2020 meeting, the last before Covid lockdown, when he discussed his newly-published book, *Elaine Morgan: a life behind the screen*. In our November meeting Daryl continued in a similar vein, talking about his most recent book, *Fury of Past Time: a life of Gwyn Thomas*. Those present enjoyed the descriptions of Gwyn Thomas's upbringing and education; English-speaking from the South Wales Valleys to further education at Oxford, before hearing about his interesting professional life as a Welsh writer and dramatist; his career in broadcasting, and also his links with national and international media stars.

A stone with a hole in Gelligaer



HOLED STONE, NEAR PENYWILOD,
GELLIGAER.

This stone is 4ft. 3in. long, 2ft. 5in. deep, and from 4½in. to 5in. thick. The distance from the hole (diameter 4½in.) to the left edge is 2ft. 9in. and a foot from the right edge. The distances across the hole and below it do not correspond with the total length of the stone (4ft. 3in.), because the stone is not a perfect oblong.

This photograph and text appeared in the *Western Mail* August 1900. If any reader has any information, or has actually seen the stone, then please inform the Society. Intrigued by the newspaper entry I did a brief search of *Welsh Journals* on line which produced the following item

from

Archaeologia

Cambrensis

1900:

A holed stone with some ornamentation is fixed upon a stile in a field near the camp (Gelligaer) on the other side of the road. Formerly there appears to have been, at this spot, a mound of earth and stone with a fountain at its base. (Carlisle's Top dict).

Penwrlod farm house is extant at the northern end of Gelligaer village but most of its land has been built on.

Howlers from Lewis School, Pengam

GHS member Carwyn Hughes has submitted this scan from the history of Lewis School Pengam, readers may well have experienced similar faux pas whilst in school or during their adult life

A CHAPTER OF REMINISCENCES.

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A FEW HOWLERS VOUCHERED FOR BY THE WRITER.

- The French were very angry with their king, Louis XVI., so they *gelatined* him. (Sept., 1911)
The son of Cadwallon was *Offa's Dike*. (Oct., 1912)
The American colonists disguised themselves as *Tomahawks*. (1916)
The cities of the Plain were Sodom and *Begorrah*. (1916)
These words were spoken after our Lord *distilled* the tempest. (April, 1905)
A disciple is one of them and an apostle is a lot of them together. (Feb., 1906)
The palsy is a disease in which a man has no use for himself; it may take him in the legs. (March, 1906)
Jacob was the father of the twelve *Patriots*. (Xmas, 1910)
The meaning of Moloch is a donkey (?Moke) (1911)
Gabriel was the *angle* of the Lord. (1914)
We dissolve the metal in *consecrated* sulphuric acid. (Oct., 1904)
A barometer is used to measure the *compassion* of air. (Feb., 1905)
The Centigrade Thermometer was invented by *Cornelius a centurion* hence its name. (Xmas, 1910)
What is the meaning of Hard Water? Ice. (1908)
The symbol for the metal copper is Cu, from its Latin name *Cupid*. (1911)
Sulphur when heated becomes *vicious* (viscous) (1912)
Cases of congruence of triangles.
Case 1. When the included angles are equal.
Case 2. When the *excluded* angles are equal. (1912)
The chief ore of iron is lodestone, and the chief ore of lead is *plumbstone*. (1928)
Cologne is noted for *Odour* Cologne. (1903)
The plural of dwarf is *Giant*. (From the Entrance Scholarship Exam., 1916.)
The masculine of Sultana is *Raisin*. (Dec., 1914)
The Protestants in France were called *Hooligans* (?Huguenots). (1904)
John the Baptist wore a leathern *girder* about his loins. (July, 1905)
Leprosy makes people thin because it eats them away. (1905)

Penallta Colliery-A visit by the Prince of Denmark

An aerial photograph showing how the pit “imposed” itself on a rural landscape



PARISH OF GELLIGAER IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

or

MAKING A DIAMOND JUBILEE PUBLICATION

by GHS editorial team

At 6 pm on Monday 22 November 2021, GHS's Diamond Jubilee publication, *PARISH OF GELLIGAER IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY*, was launched not to the fanfare of music and folk dancing before a large audience in the spacious LSP hall that, a decade earlier, welcomed GHS's Golden Jubilee publication, *BARGOED AND GILFACH A LOCAL HISTORY*, but to the whimper of some Zoom screens.

Now the dust has settled, the book read and considered, and some of the *LEFTOVERS* included in *Gelligaer Times*, the editorial team thought you may like to know more about how the book was made.



AN EARLY START 2015-16

Experience has taught GHS the importance of making an early start with projects but, with its WWI project in progress as well as what was becoming an annual commitment to publishing the journal *Gelligaer*, was GHS over-reaching itself by daring to launch a major research and publication project then?

The minutes of GHS's 2015 AGM record that the meeting agreed to the Chair's proposal for a major research and publication project to mark the Society's 60th anniversary 2021-22 and that some possible themes for the project were discussed. There followed months of further discussion both formally, as in the Society's December meeting, as well as in less formal settings and via emails, before three proposals were presented for consideration by GHS committee and potential researchers in April 2016. The three proposals were:

1. Line of development, a study of education in Gelligaer parish from earliest times to the present day
2. In-depth study of an area within the parish from earliest times to the present day and across a range of themes with focus for a such a study selected from:
 - a. Ystrad Mynach and Hengoed
 - b. Pontlottyn
 - c. Bedlinog and Trelewis
 - d. Gelligaer and nearby communities
3. In-depth study of a crucial era, the nineteenth century, when the parish changed from being largely rural, sparsely-populated and relatively isolated to industrial/semi-urban and connected to the rest of the region, the country and beyond

The following were some of the factors taken into consideration for each proposal:

- To what extent has it been researched and the results published previously?
- Does it offer sufficient opportunities for involvement by a number of researchers?
- How accessible are the sources both in terms of where they are located and the skill level and time needed for study? *How GHS researchers would have laughed if, in Spring 2016, someone had suggested that when they were well into their stride, they would be barred from archives and libraries for months in 2020-21, before being let back in under strict mask-wearing and social distancing rules to study documents quarantined between readers!*
- Is it likely to result in an end-product to interest a wide range of readers in the local area as well as some further afield.

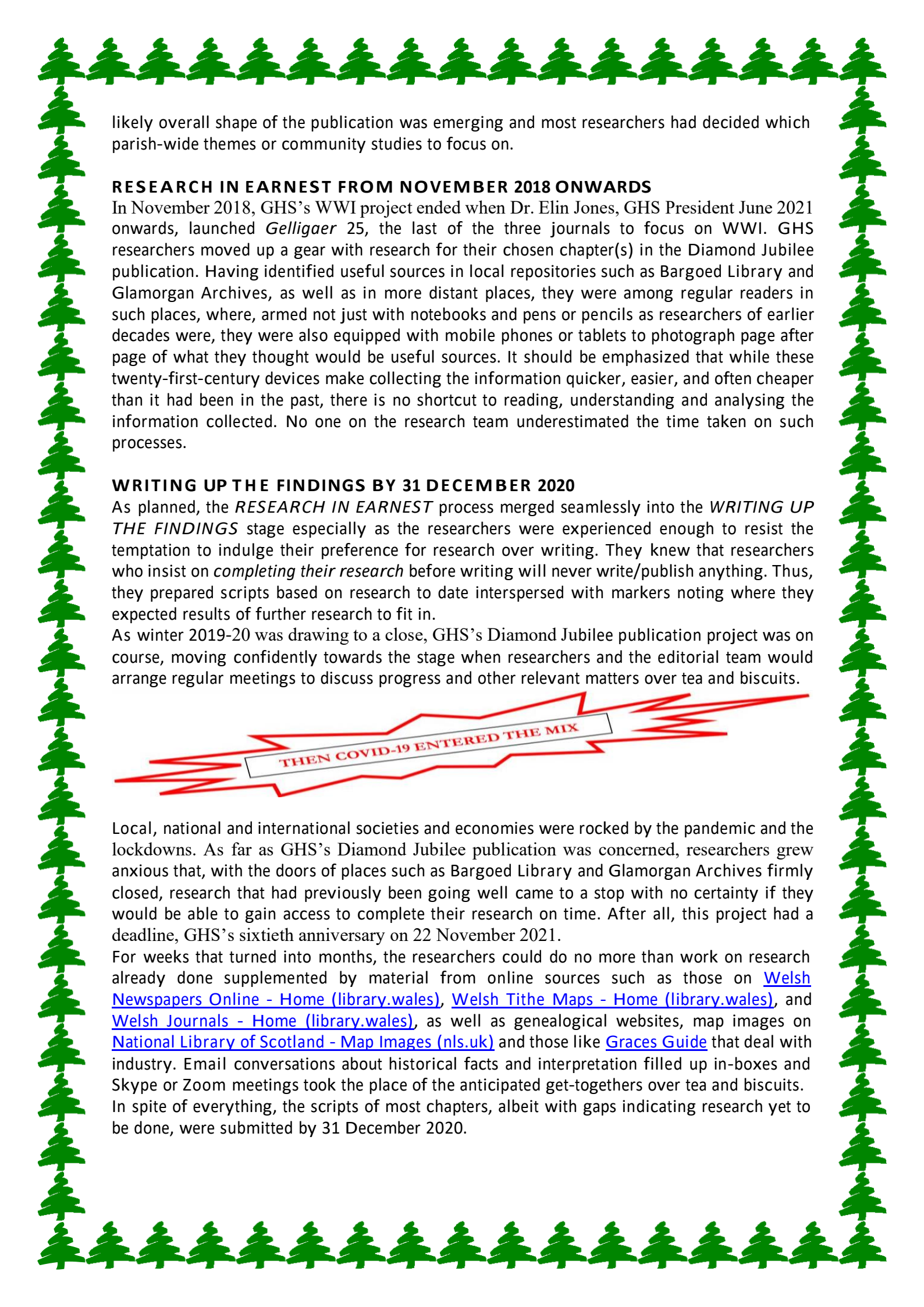
April -June saw further general discussion and consultation.

SELECTION OF TOPIC AND LAUNCH OF GHS DIAMOND JUBILEE PUBLICATION PROJECT GHS AGM JUNE 2016

Immediately following the 2016 AGM, members had a final chance to express their opinions before it became evident that the majority of members favoured proposal 3. The Diamond Jubilee project was launched, allowing some four years for research and writing before it would be collated and edited for publication.

TOOTLING ALONG JULY 2016 – NOVEMBER 2018

This was quite a relaxed stage in the process: the deadline (22 November 2021) was far in the distance and researchers dipped their toes into the nineteenth century while primarily carrying on with their existing GHS commitments to WWI project and *Gelligaer* journals, as well as personal projects. It was a time when casual reading of sections in books on the nineteenth century, *The Gelligaer Story* or articles in journals such as *Gelligaer* and *Morgannwg* whetted the appetite for full-on research into nineteenth-century Gelligaer. By the winter 2018-19 the



likely overall shape of the publication was emerging and most researchers had decided which parish-wide themes or community studies to focus on.

RESEARCH IN EARNEST FROM NOVEMBER 2018 ONWARDS

In November 2018, GHS's WWI project ended when Dr. Elin Jones, GHS President June 2021 onwards, launched *Gelligaer 25*, the last of the three journals to focus on WWI. GHS researchers moved up a gear with research for their chosen chapter(s) in the Diamond Jubilee publication. Having identified useful sources in local repositories such as Bargoed Library and Glamorgan Archives, as well as in more distant places, they were among regular readers in such places, where, armed not just with notebooks and pens or pencils as researchers of earlier decades were, they were also equipped with mobile phones or tablets to photograph page after page of what they thought would be useful sources. It should be emphasized that while these twenty-first-century devices make collecting the information quicker, easier, and often cheaper than it had been in the past, there is no shortcut to reading, understanding and analysing the information collected. No one on the research team underestimated the time taken on such processes.

WRITING UP THE FINDINGS BY 31 DECEMBER 2020

As planned, the *RESEARCH IN EARNEST* process merged seamlessly into the *WRITING UP THE FINDINGS* stage especially as the researchers were experienced enough to resist the temptation to indulge their preference for research over writing. They knew that researchers who insist on *completing their research* before writing will never write/publish anything. Thus, they prepared scripts based on research to date interspersed with markers noting where they expected results of further research to fit in.

As winter 2019-20 was drawing to a close, GHS's Diamond Jubilee publication project was on course, moving confidently towards the stage when researchers and the editorial team would arrange regular meetings to discuss progress and other relevant matters over tea and biscuits.



THEN COVID-19 ENTERED THE MIX

Local, national and international societies and economies were rocked by the pandemic and the lockdowns. As far as GHS's Diamond Jubilee publication was concerned, researchers grew anxious that, with the doors of places such as Bargoed Library and Glamorgan Archives firmly closed, research that had previously been going well came to a stop with no certainty if they would be able to gain access to complete their research on time. After all, this project had a deadline, GHS's sixtieth anniversary on 22 November 2021.

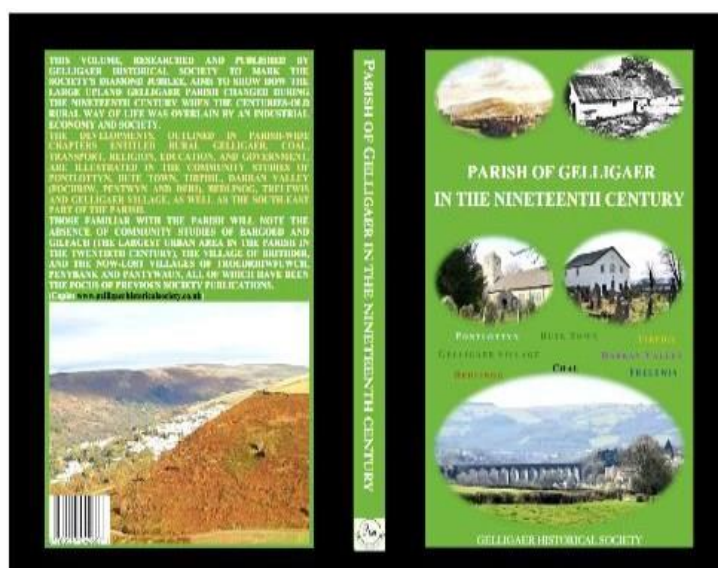
For weeks that turned into months, the researchers could do no more than work on research already done supplemented by material from online sources such as those on [Welsh Newspapers Online - Home \(library.wales\)](http://library.wales), [Welsh Tithe Maps - Home \(library.wales\)](http://library.wales), and [Welsh Journals - Home \(library.wales\)](http://library.wales), as well as genealogical websites, map images on [National Library of Scotland - Map Images \(nls.uk\)](http://nls.uk) and those like [Graces Guide](http://gracesguide.co.uk) that deal with industry. Email conversations about historical facts and interpretation filled up in-boxes and Skype or Zoom meetings took the place of the anticipated get-togethers over tea and biscuits. In spite of everything, the scripts of most chapters, albeit with gaps indicating research yet to be done, were submitted by 31 December 2020.

EDITING TO PRINTING IN 2021

When editing started in January 2021, libraries and archives were still closed, and so it was unclear whether or not some of the planned work could be completed. Nevertheless, it was evident that the time-consuming and often-brutal but essential editing process could not be delayed, especially as the team wanted the finished product to enhance GHS's reputation as much as possible. At the best of times, editing is a difficult process and lockdown superimposed an additional layer of problems with emails and some Zoom meetings replacing live discussions. Sometimes the editorial team was of one mind, but more frequently there were different opinions about what should be excluded, or which illustrations should be used, before approaching the contributor about changes in his/her well-researched chapter. On the latter, the editorial team was always grateful for the understanding and cooperation of all contributors. The editorial team agonised on whether or not the chapters should have endnotes and bibliographies before deciding to exclude most from the book, but GHS would keep the references on file to answer readers' questions about sources. This, like its other editorial decisions, was not taken lightly.

One of the more entertaining parts of the editing process was deciding on the cover, selecting the colour (eventually green to represent rural and black to stand for coal were chosen) and the illustrations to place on the cover and inside fly pages.

GHS is fortunate to have a webmaster with the skill and patience to prepare the draft for submission to the online printer used for GHS publications, and as summer 2021 gave way to autumn, the editorial team approved the chapters, believing they were as good as they could make them. Then, over to a small army of proof-readers who had the unenviable task of going through the chapters sent to them. They read paragraph by paragraph, sentence by sentence, word by word and letter by letter, to spot errors that had slipped through the editorial process. The editorial team acted on their recommendations and eventually the book was ready to send to the online printer.



THE FINAL STAGE

Once the book was handed over to the printer, the editorial team could focus on other things, including arranging the book's launch on Zoom, as advertised in *Gelligaer Times* November 2021 issue 59, as well as requesting reviews which appeared in issues 60, 61 and 62, as well as in *Morgannwg*, the journal of Glamorgan History Society LXV (2021).

IN CONCLUSION

The editorial team hopes that *PARISH OF GELLIGAER IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY* conveys the story of the changing Gelligaer parish in the nineteenth century in a way that engages both the experienced historian and the interested layperson. While it is hoped that contributors and readers find much to praise in the end-product, the editorial team is aware there may also be much to criticise and that some editorial decisions may not meet with universal approval. Every effort was made to avoid repeating previously published material

and to include the results of the most recent work of GHS research team. Inevitably there is much that could not be included in this volume and some of that may appear in future issues of GHS's journal *Gelligaer* or newsletter *Gelligaer Times*.

Mysteries in Stone Elin Jones

Gelligaer church and its association with the even more ancient site of Capel Gwladys are particularly important to us in this Society because of their links with our distant past. There are links to an even more distant past here too. Some of us were lucky enough to join Dr Edith Evans in September when she led us to the mysterious cup marked stones on Gelligaer Common, and to the numerous Bronze Age cairns on and around Carn Bugail. The stones and the sites keep their mysteries: we can see they were important, and that huge effort must have been put into their construction – but why?

Part of the fascination of the past is its mystery, and the more history you learn, the more mysterious the past becomes. Gelligaer is not the only ancient church in this area, nor is ours the only area where worship may date back to pre-Christian times – nor is it the only one with its mystery in stone. The circular graveyard around Eglwysilan church is believed by some to indicate that it was a holy place before the coming of the Romans.

As in Gelligaer, the extensive restoration carried out in the nineteenth century destroyed much of the most ancient – and decayed – fabric of the building. But discoveries were made then, and one of these is now safe on the wall of Eglwysilan church. There is an inscription below



the stone itself saying that it was dug out of the earth on the north side of the church in 1904. That much is certain. We know too that the north side of the church was thought of as the “dark” side. The door below the stone – closed off today – would have been the way those excommunicated by the church would have been made to leave the building and the community of faith.

But nobody knows exactly when or why this little, smiling warrior figure was carved into its block of stone. When I was studying these things, many years ago now, I read that it was probably carved in the Early Mediaeval Period. If this is the case, though, why is there no Christian symbol carved into the stone? Or any writing at all in any language? There are hundreds of inscribed stones from this period, but most of them have

inscriptions on them in Latin, Welsh or Irish, or they have a complex “Celtic” pattern – and sometimes both. There are some stones with just a rough cross shape cut into them but there isn't even that to be seen on the Warrior Stone of Eglwysilan.

Is it a later mediaeval carving? It could be – the warrior has a sword at his side, and a round shield. But why is there no name or any inscription, and why is the style of carving so primitive? It is more like a child's drawing than any mediaeval warrior figure I have seen. And why does he seem to be *smiling*? His enigmatic expression reminds me powerfully of the “archaic smile” the sculptors of ancient Greece gave to their statues in the sixth century BC.

Might this little warrior be the smiling image of a pagan god of war? If Eglwysilan was a pagan sacred site might some long ago Christian have buried the wicked image out of sight, and on the side of the church associated with evil? Or did some pagan place their idol in the ground for safety? But pre-Christian warrior figures tend to carry spears, not swords, although swords were known in pre-Roman times. They were found amongst the offerings thrown into Llyn Fawr in the Rhondda sometime between 800 and 600BC.

Or did some apprentice stone mason try out his tools on a handy block of stone, and then hide it for some reason? Was it a joke by someone used to working in stone? But if so, why was such a useful chunk of stone not used at some point in repairing the church? This often happened to all sorts of stones, with or without inscriptions. The Idnert Stone is a very important inscribed stone, since the inscription on it has been interpreted as one of the earliest references to St David. The full inscription was recorded in the 17th century when the stone was in use as a windowsill in church of Llanddewi Brefi. It was subsequently broken up to use in repairing the fabric of the church, but bits of the inscription can still be identified in the stonework.

No-one seems to have a definite answer to this puzzle. The Warrior of Eglwysilan keeps his secrets – no wonder he is smiling!

Darran Valley History Group Powers ahead



You will recall (or you should if you read your Newsletter properly) that back in an earlier edition I wrote about the Darran Valley Group's project to mark the site of the former village of Penybank. We are a 'hands-on' group, and we made and installed the information board ourselves.

The unveiling took place in the rain in May, and the information board we installed alongside the Parc Cwm Darran footpath has proved immensely popular, with many former residents of Penybank

making the 'pilgrimage' from the visitor centre along the path to see it, and to remember. Strangers to the area out just to enjoy the walk, have remarked how interesting our board was as many didn't know that there'd been a village there. The feedback from these 'pilgrims' and others, has led directly to our current project, and indirectly to another scheme that's on the drawing board at the moment.

The one that's nearing fruition is the provision of a bench which will be placed alongside the footpath, opposite the information panel. Time and again we heard that, yes, it was lovely to

revisit old times but ‘ isn’t it a long way to and from the visitor centre with nowhere to rest’. Being of an age with many of these visitors, any of us in the group heartily agreed with them!

We had to fund the information panel ourselves with just a little help, but the cost of buying a suitable bench and installing it would have been a bench too far, particularly as the park manager had nudged us towards a seat made from reclaimed tyres (I believe) and is rot-proof, vandal-resistant and additionally, if the adverts are to be believed, leaves you completely refreshed and ready to make the return journey much faster than the outward trip

We successfully convinced one of the bodies out there with some cash, that this would be a worthwhile project with community benefits, and they came up with the money we needed to press ahead. Not as much as we’d asked for, but enough. The scheme that I mentioned as being on the drawing board, is another information panel much like the one at Penybank. This time it will be where the railway station in Deri used to be. There’s no trace of it now, and our board will be a reminder of this busy station that disappeared in 1963.



A couple of years ago, we made sure that those from Deri who died in the first and second world wars were suitably honoured by installing a War Memorial with the names of the fallen, identified after much research by DVHG member David Williams. To ensure that their memory lives on, the DVHG once again organised a well-supported Remembrance Service on Armistice Day .With a little string-pulling, the service was attended by the Deputy Lord

Lieutenant, the High Sheriff, the Mayor of the Borough, the local MP, our councillor, and many residents. Every bit as important, there were children from the village’s primary school, who took part in the service.

The DVHG might be a newcomer, but I do like to think we make our mark by keeping awareness of our rich heritage alive in the valley

Brian Jarrett. December 2022

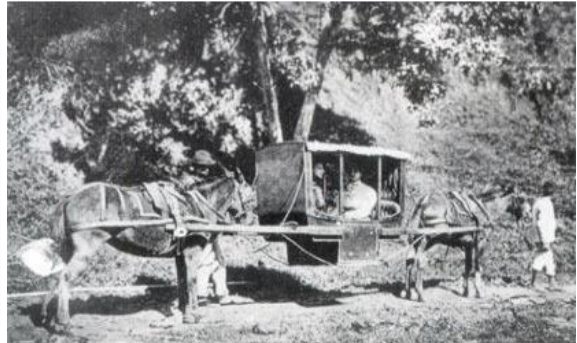
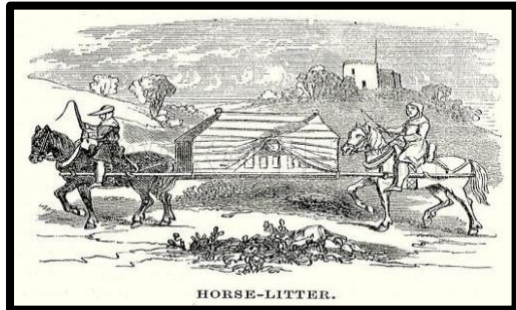
Travel in the hills

An interesting foot note appeared in an article in *Cardiff and Merthyr Guardian* of November 1851:

Transport by litter was used in Glamorganshire particularly in the hilly parts at late as the early part of the last century. Persons living fifty years ago remember Mrs Matthews of Aberaman making yearly pilgrimages in a horse litter from Aberdare over the Llanfabon mountain and through Caerphilly to spend Christmas with her parents at Llanishen and on her route a yearly visit to Llancaeach and Llanbradach.

The conveyance was in those days called in this county **Elor Feirch** which in modern terms is Welsh for hearse.

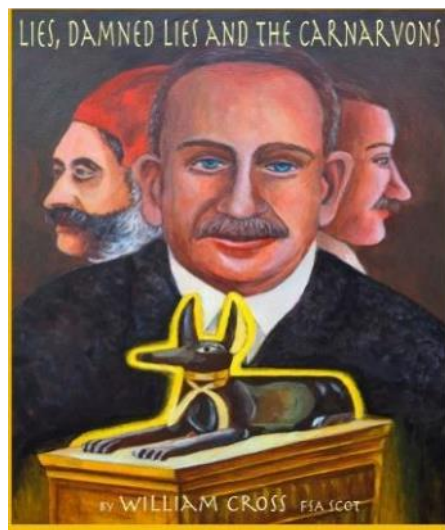
Two examples of a horse litter appear below, it would be interesting to find an illustration of the style of horse litter used in the south Wales area.



New Publications

Lies, Damned Lies and the Carnarvons

100 Years on New Book Unveils the True Story Behind Discovery of Old King Tut's Tomb



Controversial as ever, Will Cross is intent on exposing the many lies and unexplained mysteries before and after the discovery of the tomb, as well as the plethora of inter-personal relationships that underpinned the event. He asks the difficult questions – such as who was it who deliberately covered up all the embarrassing truths about Lord Carnarvon's chequered life, debauchery, and self-inflicted disease, so creating deceit that has blighted history. ISBN 9781905914777 :

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The Bristol Connection

Peter Strong

£6.00 (including UK p+p)

Peter Strong's new book is an exploration through the medium of the Frost family of the neglected story of the political, cultural and commercial links across the Bristol Channel between the city of Bristol and Newport and other parts of south east Wales in the 19th century. After John Frost was transported to Tasmania in 1840 following the Newport Rising, his wife and family moved to Bristol, settling first in Montpelier and then in Stapleton. When Frost returned from exile in 1856, he lived out his days in the family's Stapleton cottage, and was buried in Horfield parish churchyard in Bristol after his death in 1877. Peter Strong is a retired history teacher and is the current Chair of Gwent County History Association.

Book Details

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VOLUME 32

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A REVIEW WILL APPEAR IN THE NEXT EDITION OF THIS
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