

Garw Valley Heritage Society Newsletter



CROESO I HYDREF 2019

This edition as usual covers assorted themes and topics- some historical sporting events, some memoirs, some news and a heartening recovery of a very sick little boy. Plus a poem of course!



Washing Line in Hill View, Pontycymer, with the Faldau pit centre background

Our Website: www.garwheritage.co.uk

Full of photos from our archive and local stories and memories, the Garw Valley Society website is building up a collection of local stories of past events and personalities.



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The Missing “M” - *CT Davies*



It has been said on various web-sites that Pontcymmer being spelt with two letters M is a mistake, and that only one M should be used. Yet modern maps are displaying adjacent sites as being Pontcymmer, and Braichcymmer. I would like to ask please, who is responsible for deciding what is, and is not; the correct spelling?

The origin of Cymmer is from the Brithonic words **Com** or **Cum** meaning *jointly, or together with*, and **Ber** to convey. Today the general term *confluence* means the same, which is a *conveying or flowing together*.

What appears to have happened over time that the M-B sound in Brithonic has softened into M-M in Welsh. It is important to remember the difference between the spoken word and its spelling, especially with regard to the level of literacy in any population over time. The Cornish and Breton languages use Kemper as their equivalent of Cymmer. (See the Breton City of Kemper, which the French spell as Quimper)

As for the word Aber, which precedes the name of a lesser body of water, where it enters into a greater body of water, are to be found in Scotland and can be used to delineate the boundaries of Brithonic and Goedelic Celtic Languages. Brithonic Celtic, which was spoken at least as far north as Perth in what is today Scotland; was the origin of King Alfred's "Strathclyde Welsh". This does not mean, as some maintain; that the Welsh migrated northwards, or vice versa.

A-Ber names can be found both inland and on the coast. In Gaelic Scotland the use of *In-Bher* (1st mutation of In - Ber) is found as the equivalent of both *Aber* & *Cymmer*, the *BH* having the sound value as the Welsh *F*.

So, where next is on the list for correcting? In Bettws, one T is now fading away into the mists of time, and Lluest has already lost its U, (except on its bus shelter), so can we expect Glyncorwg to become Glyncowg? Is there someone with brush, paint, and ladder, just itching to make a start?

As to the correct version of Cymmer, there does not appear to be any definitive answer, and both pronunciations sound exactly the same. For myself I feel that as two MMs are better than one, I will keep to that spelling.

From the archives:

This August saw the 35th anniversary of the miners' strike, which so divided the Valley, and the nation. This is one of our many photographs from that time.



The following poem was sent from a reader- we don't know whether this was personal or not, but it certainly strikes a chord!

Falling Apart

There is an art to falling apart, as the years go by,
and life does not begin at 40, that's a big fat lie.

My hair is getting thinner, my body is not,
the teeth I have left are beginning to rot.

I now smell of vapo-rub, not Chanel No 5, what more can I say?
I am off to read the 'obits', Like I do every day;

If my names not there, I'll once again start
perfecting the art of falling apart.

What we have been doing:

- ◆ More archiving now that we have a bit more space in the upper vestry at Tabernacle, but it is still a long way to go.
- ◆ We put a small display in the engine shed in support of the Garw Valley Railway's Open Day on the Spring Bank Holiday Monday, which will be repeated on the August Bank Holiday Monday.
- ◆ The Hut in Parc Calon Lan also has some of our photographs on display.



The two Pamelas: Mrs Pam Hayes, GVHS member, and the engine Pamela, in the Railway shed earlier this year.

Future events:

- ◆ The GVHS will be joining with Valley and Vale for an Open day at Sardis chapel in Betws on August 31st.
- ◆ Gerald Jarvis will be conducting his annual Calon Lan walks from the Hut on Saturday 14th September, at 10 am and at 2pm.
- ◆ Tabernacle will be holding an Open Day as part of Cadw's annual Open Doors festival on Saturday September 21st. This will consist of an exhibition of mining and social history of the Garw. Entrance is free, refreshments provided, and Mr Peter David will be playing the organ mid-day for requests and old favourites. *See local press and posters.*
- ◆ We will also be providing speakers in October to the Glamorgan Family History Society, where their monthly talks take place in Aberkenfig.

Details of all these can be found on our website, www.garwheritage.co.uk

The Great Welsh Run

By David JK Jones

The Great Welsh Run was a huge sporting event in the Welsh calendar back in the first thirty years or so of the 20th century. It was either run at the Taff Vale Park, Pontypridd or Virginia Park, Caerphilly. Runners came from all over the world to compete in it. Colloquially, it was known as the Welsh Powderhall or the Great Welsh Sprint. It truly was a feather in the cap for any runner to win this famous race and attracted such athletic legends as Jack Donaldson of Australia and the American legend C E Holway. A crowd in excess of 40,000 always watched this event. The runners ran on a track of cinders or grass.

The first winner of this prestigious event was a Scotsman, Harry Howden from Edinburgh. Wales didn't have to wait too long for a winner with F Coombes of Tonypany winning the race in 1904.

The most controversial race ever ran which incited crowd anger was run in 1911 and involved a runner from Pontycymer, Alec (Alexander) Rowe of 145 Oxford Street. Alec Rowe, Coal Miner was 21 in 1911 and was born in St Brides Major but had lived in Pontycymer for the majority of his life.

Tommy Oldfield from Cardiff was to win the race "by the thickness of his running vest". The contentious issue however was the manner of his finish.

Oldfield clearly broke the finishing tape with an outstretched left arm but to his left was Pontycymer's Alec Rowe whose left foot clearly reached the line before Oldfield's stretch for the ribbon. The vast majority of the crowd considered Rowe to be the winner but it was the Referee's decision that counted.

The ref was Dai Williams of the Greyhound Hotel, Pontypridd who sent the crowd into an angered frenzy by awarding the race to the Cardiff man.

In years to come, it transpired that these events were rigged and fiddles by bookmakers, athletes and some referees were commonplace.

The last Great Welsh Run was ran in 1934.

Alec Rowe returned to Pontycymer a hero and several newspaper reports show that he continued to run and won many more awards.

A Game of Throws: *being a short treatise on Cnapan by Gerald Jarvis*

Although its exact origin is unknown ball sports such as Cnapan have been documented in 9th century text, which suggest that this sport had been played for hundreds of years. Said to have originated during the Dark Ages of the 5th to 10th centuries, Cnapan is/was a violent mob-based ball game played in West Wales.

The game itself may have developed from the need to train people for combat, as most battles were of the 'push and shove' *melée* type, where often the strongest were the victors.

Games were played between neighbouring villages and towns where teams competed for control of a slippery wooden ball, and attempted by any means to return the ball to his home church by throwing to other team members. Some may say it was a precursor to modern rugby, albeit with fewer rules and a lot more injuries.

Cnapan used a wooden ball, similar in size to a baseball. Prior to the match the ball would be boiled in animal fat to make it extremely slippery. The game would start in neutral territory, ideally at a point between the two teams' towns. The ball should be placed on the ground and both 'teams' should retire 100 paces from it, and at a signal it was every man for himself. The 'pitch' was pretty much everything in between the two churches, whether it be fields, rivers, swampland or forest, and included any villages in between.

Typically, teams would strip down to their breeches; this was usually to avoid their clothes being torn or caught hold of in the forthcoming confrontation, and it would also make them harder to tackle. Horse riders were armed with batons, and those on foot could throw stones at the horsemen. (A Breton game called Soule, was played without the horses).

The aim of the game was to get the ball into your home church porch by sunset, using any means possible. This means the ball could be carried, passed, or thrown, on foot or horseback. Contrary to the violent nature of the game, stealth and cunning could also be brought into play to try and smuggle the ball unseen.

Cnapan was played on Sundays and at religious festivals, such as Shrove Tuesday, Easter Monday, Ascension Day and Corpus Christi. Because the home base of each team was their church, the sport had developed a strong cultural significance with religious practice. During the game teams could wrestle, fight, throw things at each other, strike with sticks and even use small weapons, (several people are recorded to have died of knife wounds whilst playing Cnapan). The game which was open to all classes was also used as an excuse to settle 'old scores'. Games started at midday and traditionally ended at sunset. If no team had won by then, a draw was called.

There were several attempts to ban this sport, and several other forms of 'mob' football. One such attempt was in 1314, after the English annexation of Wales. However, it was not for reasons of public safety; the English thought the game was a useless activity and wanted their subjects to learn archery instead!

Saved by a bat

by Gerald Jarvis

In 1932, 12-year-old Peter Mainwaring, of Llangeinor in the Garw Valley, was stricken with a serious illness. The boy was taken first to Bridgend General Hospital and X-Rays revealed something on his lung.

Tuberculosis was immediately suspected and Peter was sent to Craig-y-Nos Sanatorium in Powys.

Although he received excellent care in the 9 weeks he was there Peter grew worse instead of better. One day his family received the message to come immediately because he was dying.

They came and took Peter home to Llangeinor and made him as comfortable as possible. During that long night, as his father recalled,

"It was about two'clock in the morning. I sat in the kitchen stirring the embers of the fire. Mary, my wife, was upstairs, and in the next room lay Peter dying. I heard a loud scream and I ran into the room. Hurling itself against a half-open window was a large bat trying to escape. I let the bat free, and attended to Peter. He was coughing so violently I thought each gasp would be his last."

The local doctor was called and found a large molar tooth had been dislodged from Peter's lung, and he had coughed it up! Its point was very sharp, like a needle. The boy must have swallowed the tooth two years earlier, and it had entered his lung, causing the symptoms of Tuberculosis. Once Peter had coughed up the tooth, his condition improved and he made a full recovery.

YOUR HELP NEEDED:

As ever we welcome your comments, suggestions, and contributions for future newsletters. We would love to hear from you!

GARW GLEANINGS

The Garw Gleanings appeared in the Glamorgan Gazette for many years. They were written under the name of Lloffwr Arall and were a mixture of news and comedy items that were regarded as being true. The names of the people in the stories were never written in the newspaper though most of the community would have soon known their identities as these items were regularly discussed throughout the valley. Here are some of the amusing items that appeared in the column during the 1914-1918 War, and shows how life on the home front went on as normal, despite the momentous outside events.

Time for Work?

Who was the Blaengarw Colliery worker who woke up thinking he had slept late for work? He dressed as quickly as he could and left his house without having his breakfast and went as fast as he could to the colliery. When he arrived at the pit he found out the time was 2:30 in the morning. All except one found the episode very amusing.

PS. He tried to explain matters by saying the hands of the clock had fallen down.

Terror at the Cinema?

A realistic moving picture of lions that was shown at the Hippodrome the other evening gave one young lady in the audience such a terrible fright that she clasped the young man next to her in a tight embrace.

The Germans Have Arrived!

A young man had such a fright at three o'clock in the morning that he was heard to shout loudly, "The Germans have arrived." What happened was that the legs of his bedstead had given way and he was left in the middle of the room with the bed having turned turtle.

NOTICE: *All items printed in our newsletters come from archive material which in turn has been given to us by contributors, or researched from acknowledged sources by our members. If any reader has additional information on the subjects listed, or wishes to correct an error, please get in touch with us via the website or ring the editor on 01656 856091.*

