

Garw Valley Heritage Society Newsletter



Croeso i Gwanwyn 2020

This Spring edition has some more information and stories about sheep, an item on Daniel James of Calon Lan fame (this year marks the centenary of his death), an interesting look at what went for punishment in our schools 100 years ago, news of what we have been doing and what will be happening this year, and of course a poem or two.



Sheep at Tyn-y-Betws farm, Byron Duckfield.

A reminder that in these challenging times that we live in a beautiful valley.

We are keen to borrow historical material so that can be indexed and copied with the consent of the owner, and would be grateful for any photos, family recollections, funny stories, tales of excitement or adventure in the Valley.



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A FIREMAN'S FOLLY, (WITH REGARD TO SHEEP)

As you may guess, animals feature large in a fireman's life, and I remember when we had a call to a house in Pontycymer where a flock of fifteen sheep had been startled enough to run onto a lean-to which was level with the road. The combined weight of all of them went crashing through the Perspex roof and proceeded to run riot through the rest of the house with no-one noticing until the householder came home from work, and on opening her front door found a lot of very nervous (and very incontinent) sheep.

We even had to rescue a sheep from the roof of a 3-storey house once, an event which captured the imagination of the national press!

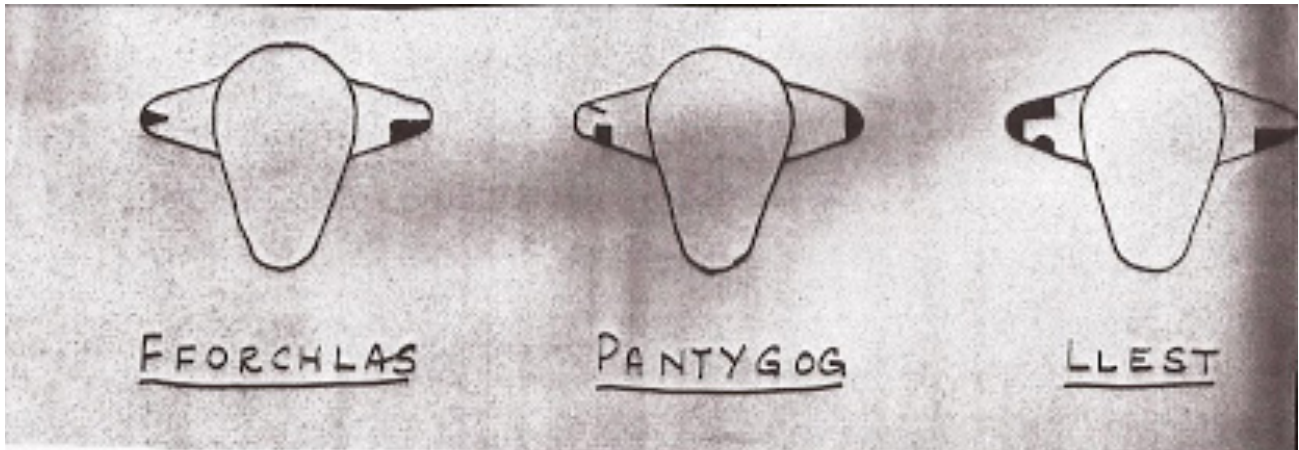
My most memorable sheep encounter came about when the Glamorgan Fire Service had recently swapped our old wooden extendable ladder for a shiny bright aluminium one. This was brought into use when a telegraph pole went on fire just above Pontycymer Square- the junction box had apparently shorted and set alight to the creosote-soaked pole. I drew the short straw for going up the insecure and slippery ladder. The ladder slipped, there was a bright blue flash, the man holding the bottom of the ladder got a shock and so released his hold, and I was thrown off. I came to, surrounded by three grinning faces (too ugly to be angels so I knew I hadn't died). My fall had been perfectly executed with the ladder coming to rest in the ferns a yard away from where I lay, and as for me, I landed on a sheep!

Now Garw sheep are not as the tourist kind: fluffy and pretty like balls of wool, our sheep are hard and unforgivingly angular beasts, so I felt the impact, although it is likely my bulky uniform had also played a part in saving me from more serious injury. I carry the mental scars, and mocking laughter of my colleagues, with me to this day. The sheep of course just got up and ambled off!



Submitted by Gerald Jarvis

THE SHEEP OF THE GARW



Some examples of sheep markings in the Garw

From earliest times sheep have been a prominent feature of the landscape of the Garw Valley. The Cistercians who were settled in the abbey of Margam under the Normans in the 12th century held vast estates, or granges, in the uplands around Llangeinor, and along with the monks at Tintern, were the richest wool producers in South Wales. Margam's sheep amounted to 5245 in 1291, bringing in the highest revenue of any abbey in South Wales. Many of those sheep will have grazed on the Garw hills and mountains.

Up until the 19th century there were still hundreds more sheep than people, the area being agricultural serving the market town of Bridgend. The discovery of coal however brought people in their thousands to work, and from 1880 onwards the population of the Bridgend Valleys expanded rapidly, as did all the South Wales valleys where coal was mined. All these people had to be fed, and as the population increased so did the numbers of sheep, and a close relationship developed between the farmers and the miners, with fortunes interlinked, for many years.

Livestock auctions started appearing all over South Wales, and the first sale at

Blackmill took place before the First World War, and during that war provided valuable service for both community and country. Over the following decades these auctions became big social occasions, with the Fox and Hounds and Ogmores Junction pubs benefitting from the increased custom.

Sheep would be driven from many miles away and the sight of farmers and miners coming down from the mountains must have been an impressive sight. The roads to Blackmill on auction days would have been completely impassable with the flocks crowding the roads and lanes. Because the surrounding hillsides were not fenced the farmers had to gather up their sheep on horseback; each sheep would be known to individual farmers by the earmark it carried. These earmarks come from centuries-old tradition, arising from complex beliefs and cultural values. This system of marking has all but disappeared, as the sheep nowadays have to sport a tag which displays their flock number, with no reference to the marks that have been used through the centuries.

STOP PRESS: NEWS

• The Garw Valley Heritage Society is pleased to announce that it has been given charitable status as a Registered Incorporated Charity by the Charities Commission. This has been achieved with the help and support of BAVO, the Bridgend Association of Voluntary Organisations, of which the GVHS is a member. Special thanks are due to Deb Evans for her unstinting advice on the volume of forms required.

• On February 6th the old society was dissolved and the new one came into being under its number 1187117. The officers had to resign and be re-elected, and a board of trustees appointed- see below. The Society's name remains the same, as do all bank and contact details, but its new status means that in matters of donations and grant applications there are tax advantages such as Gift Aid, and in matters of recognition and involvement with external bodies such as other Heritage and Historical societies the GVHS becomes a more important asset to the Garw Valley.

Trustees of the Garw Valley Heritage Society:

- Roger Stokes - Chairman
- Jean Fowlds - Secretary
- Ian Black - Treasurer
- Colin Simper -Deputy Chairman, Photographer
- Gerald Jarvis- Research and reporting
- Linda Webb - Archivist
- Katie Humphrey - Social Media manager

It is planned that an Open Day to mark the new status will be held in the Summer this year, the year which also marks the centenary of the death of Daniel James of Calon Lan fame.

We are also planning an exhibition in Bryngarw park on the weekend of May 8-10, which marks the centenary of VE Day, but the advent of the Coronavirus means both these events may be postponed until later in the year.

DANIEL JAMES

Daniel James (Gwryrosydd)
Author of Calon Lan

Calon Lan

*Nid wy'n gofyn bywyd moethus,
 Aur y byd na'i berlau mân:
 Gofyn wyf am galon hapus,
 Calon onest, calon lân.*

Chorus
*Calon lân yn llawn daioni,
 Tecach yw na'r lili dlo:
 Dim ond calon lân all ganu
 Canu'r dydd a chanu'r nos.*

*Pe dymunwn olud bydol,
 Hedyn buan ganddo sydd;
 Golud calon lân, rimweddol,
 Yn dwyn bythol chw fydd.*

Chorus
*Hwyr a bore fy rymuniad
 Gwyd i'r nef ar odain cân
 Ar i Ddew, er mwyn fy Ngheldwad,
 Roddi i mi galon lân.*

Chorus



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Translation

I don't ask for a luxurious life,
 the world's gold or its fine pearls,
 I ask for a happy heart,
 an honest heart, a pure heart.

Chorus
 A pure heart full of goodness,
 It is more beautiful than the lovely lily,
 None but a pure heart can sing,
 Sing in the day, sing in the night.

If I asked for worldly wealth,
 It would swiftly go to seed;
 The riches of a virtuous, pure heart
 Will bear eternal profit.

Chorus
 Evening and morning, my wish
 Rising to heaven on the wing of song
 To God, for the sake of my Saviour,
 Give me a pure heart.

Chorus

Daniel James was born on January 23rd 1848, one of five children born to Daniel and Mary James of Treboeth, Swansea. Life was hard for the James family as it was for all families living in the mining communities of South Wales, and Daniel had to start work at the age of 13 as a labourer. After hard work he became a puddler, working at Landore tinplate works until they closed in 1894.

By then he had married Ann Hopkins, who died aged just 38, leaving him with four children. He later married Gwenllian, a widow with five children, and together they had a further three children. On the closure of the Landore works Daniel and his large family moved to Blaengarw where he spent 20 years as a miner, before ending his working life at the age of 68 as a cemetery caretaker in Mountain Ash. He died aged 72 in Morriston, Swansea, and is buried in Mynyddbach chapel, his hometown chapel in Swansea.

Throughout his adult life Daniel held a love of poetry, and could often be found composing intricate Welsh verse, often for just the price of a pint, as although he was a hardworking man, he frequently was to be found in one of the several pubs in Blaengarw. He originally wrote under the name of Daniel Mynyddbach but he later wrote verse under the Bardic name of "Gwryrosydd"

Three books of his poetry were published, and it was in one of these that Calon Lan appears. It is said that it was written in the Blaengarw Arms hotel, but it cannot be stated with certainty that it was in that pub, as there were several pubs in Blaengarw when he lived there. There seems to be more credence in the legend that it was in the Blaengarw Arms that it was first sung, after Tom Bedford-Richards, a local organist and composer set the words to music. The music we know today however was composed by John Hughes, a fellow worker from his Landore days. This music and words together became, and remain, one of the most popular hymns in Wales, and is often referred to as the second National Anthem of Wales.

It is fitting that on March 12th 2020, 100 years after his death, that a plaque will be unveiled at the Blaengarw Arms by AM Huw Irranca Davies, a plaque which will be forever on view to remind Blaengarw of its place in history.

CATERPILLAR SWARM 1884.

On June 16th 1884 immense swarms of caterpillars were reported to have made their appearance in the mountains of east Glamorgan, especially between the Rhondda Valley and Maesteg.

The newspapers of the day were full of detailed reports on the progress of this infestation and the probable outcome for hill farmers.

Western Mail June.16th 1884. Rhondda; A plague of caterpillars has for the last two weeks infested the mountains hereabouts. These creatures appear to subsist solely upon the grass and are now showing signs of spreading further in search of more food; they are already to be found in vast numbers on the mountains of Ystradfodwg, Frwdamos, and Gilfach Goch. The Holy Well of St Mary (Ffynon Fair, Fendigaid) on Penrhys mountain has been contaminated by their falling in, in such great numbers that it is feared they will block the pumps to the reservoir which it feeds and interrupt the supply.

Colonel Picton Turberville has commissioned experts to report on the nature of this insect invasion. They are studying any cases in the past of this phenomenon, particularly the writings of the Italian agriculturalist, Count Vincenzo Dandolo, who wrote, 'That the caterpillar, during its 30 day growth cycle, is capable of growing up to 40 times its length and up to 9,500 times its original weight. This feat can be accomplished by its eating 50,000 times its own weight each 24 hours.'

Miss. E.A.Ormerod, of the Royal Agricultural College. (Cirencester), has confirmed from specimens that she has received, that these are identifiable as the caterpillar of the Antler Moth. Late last year the female moths dropped their eggs at night whilst in flight, which landed amongst the roots of the mountain grass. These now have hatched into the caterpillars, who lie dormant during the day, but come out at dusk to feed on the roots and grass itself throughout the night. Her practical solution to this current problem would be to send out lots of small boys at dusk wearing hob-nail boots to stamp on them.

The Western Mail has commissioned its reporter 'Morien,' to travel to the affected areas and report back his findings firsthand.

"I walked some miles from the Bwlch this evening, in the direction of Maesteg and into the Ogmore & Garw valleys, and found that these insects are indeed everywhere underfoot. I came across in one place a large hole in the ground, where there were tens of thousands of the creatures writhing around having presumably fallen in.

Some of the hills in the Ogmore Valley had been fired in an effort to stem the flood of these predators, and the Garw's slopes seemed to be alive with them. Large flocks of crows were busy feasting on the bounty before them, darting down to fill their beaks, although it is already feared that birds may inadvertently spread the plague further afield by dropping some caterpillars on, as yet, untouched areas of the valleys."



FROM THE ARCHIVES.....

We recently came across a booklet named the AL PUNISHMENT BOOK, published by Educational publishers EJ Arnold, which had been supplied to Blaengarw school by the Council in 1916. In it was listed all the children who had displeased their teachers and the punishment meted out to them, so in October of that year:

Haydn Morris of class 1a ran home from school and got two strokes of the cane on his hands and a few on his behind.

Herbert Griffiths of class III struck a boy with a stone without cause and had the same punishment.

George James of class IV was heard using filthy language and was given four strokes on his hands and more on his behind. A week later he was found bullying the school monitor so was given more of the same, obviously not having learned from his earlier misdemeanour!

Other boys' misdeeds included striking matches, truancy, smoking on the way home, and fighting. The most extreme punishment however seemed to be reserved for blasphemy and bad language, how times have changed! And of course the law does not allow for corporal punishment like that any more!

A POEM FOR SPRING

Verna Williams, Bettws Community Choir

Verna writes: As a member of the choir we were always encouraged to write our own poems and songs, and in early Spring, four years ago, I wrote the following after a gruelling winter:

Spring is round the corner, you can feel it in the air
Early lambs are gambolling in the fields without a care.

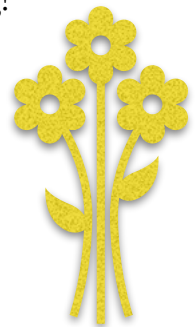
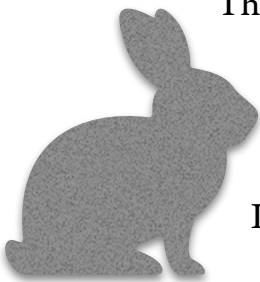
Chorus:

It's nature's way of showing that there are new beginnings,
For just around the corner it's going to be Spring, it's going to be Spring!

The buds are on the trees again, they come back every year
Heralding new life to fill our hearts with cheer.

Chorus:

So if you're feeling lonely, just walk a mile or so,
Looking at the beauty all around you as you go.



Stay well and stay
safe from us all at
The Garw Heritage
Society