

Garw Valley Heritage Society Newsletter



Croeso i Haf!

Summer is here and we even have the weather to prove it, so far anyway, so welcome to this edition, an attempt to get back to some sort of normality. We could not ignore the Queen's Platinum Jubilee, so we are showing a few photographs of the exhibition we held over the weekend of 4 and 5 June at Y Nyth, in Bryngarw Park (see below for details). Also included are some varied archive articles: an item on bats, an avalanche, and an article from Edward Thomas, a Betws bard, written on his walks around the Garw in 1910.

A stunning photograph by our photographer Colin Simper of a Red Kite over the top of the Garw reminds us of the lovely place we live in. Our back pages include a plea for new members, and a precis of the GVHS history, a society formed 15 years ago, and in need of fresh blood to continue the good work.



Above and below: some royal memorabilia, coronation china, booklets and programmes, and coins of the realm from pre-decimalisation days.



WHAT WE HAVE BEEN DOING

The Jubilee weekend was an opportunity to show some of our material in an exhibition at Y Nyth in Bryngarw Park, courtesy of Awen, which over Saturday and Sunday displayed aspects of Garw life over the 70 years of the Queen's reign, as well as some Royal memorabilia. Judging from the Visitors' Book comments, the public old and new saw many aspects of the Garw that they wanted to know more about, and wanted to visit the area again.



Correspondence through Facebook and our website has been as busy as ever.

OTHER NEWS: We have started back with the cataloguing of our numerous artefacts, books and photographs, and realise that this will be an ongoing project practically forever, as we have been given so many items of interest that we hope will benefit students of social history in the future.

Please continue to support us with your enquiries, offers of material for the archives, and visiting the website. If you need a contact telephone number, please call Jean Fowlds, Secretary, on 01656 856091

FROM THE ARCHIVES:

SAVED BY A BAT.

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.

From the Glamorgan Gazette, 4/11/1927.

20 members of the clerical staff at the International Coal Company Ltd, at Blaengarw, had a miraculous escape on Tuesday 4th November, when a substantial portion of the 100 foot high colliery waste tip behind the office came down and fell right on top of the buildings, which were completely destroyed.

Mr. Evan Jones, a local Butcher, was riding on horseback along the mountain-side when he saw the tip start to move. He turned his horse and galloped at speed towards the offices, shouting out to warn anyone in the vicinity. Just as the very last man evacuated the building there was a heavy thud and the buildings were engulfed with about a half acre of spoil..

All the men were very grateful to their heroic rescuer. "We were busy working," said one, "when we heard yelling, and the clatter of hooves. We thought that a pit-horse had broken loose and was running away so we dashed to the windows to look. We did not realise that we were moments away from death!"

No damage was caused to the pit-shaft, which was about 50 yards from the avalanche site,

but, as a precaution, work underground was suspended, and the men were brought to the surface. A few years ago there was a similar occurrence, but on a smaller scale.

The recent heavy rain, together with the mountain springs which abound in this area is believed to be responsible for the landslide. A lot of the debris also fell onto the railway siding below, and smashed tracks and a number of railway trucks.

There are about 40 houses in Pwllcarn Terrace, but none were threatened by the landslide. On Wednesday night, a large number of men were out under the supervision of Mr. W. J. Morgan, Manager for the International Colliery Company. Strong efforts were being made to divert the spring water which had forced its way through the tip. A Great Western Railway breakdown gang was also in attendance and rendered valuable assistance repairing the damaged tracks.

Blaengarw Fire Brigade were called out to extinguish the flames caused by a fire in timber of the wrecked building. Officials present said that it was hoped to recover colliery records from the building once the debris was cleared.

Edward Thomas (Cochfarf), 1853-1912

Edward Thomas was born in 1853 in Betws at Nantwyth farmhouse, son to Llewellyn Thomas, who died when he was 10 years of age. He was educated in Betws, but on his father's death the family moved to Melin Ifan Ddu. By 1878 he had gone to Cardiff to work as a carpenter on the old Cardiff Town Hall in St Mary Street, a building he was to frequently enter as a representative of the Cardiff ratepayers, becoming a councillor in 1890 and mayor in 1902. He was deeply interested in history and antiquities and a passionate supporter of the Society for the Preservation of the Welsh Language, as well as being a staunch liberal, working for the disestablishment and disendowment of the Church in Wales. His second marriage was to a daughter of the Rev. Richard Hughes of Maesteg, and as Madame Hughes Thomas she became widely known for her Welsh Ladies' Choir which toured world-wide. It was when Edward accompanied her on her tour to Pittsburg in Pennsylvania that he was able to help and advise on the setting up of the international eisteddfod that was held at Pittsburgh in 1913, an event he was unable to live to see.

Here's what he wrote about Betws in September 1910, on one of his walks:

In my rambles up and down the hill and dales of this lovely Glamorgan, I would like to take you on the path leading to the 'Land of Awenyddion,' Bettws Ty Iarll, the rendezvous of the Bards of Glamorgan. Follow me from Tondy up to the quaint village of Coytrahen, and across the Llynfi river, over the old arch-bridge, and turn to the stile that leads into a fairy-like and romantic path, after a walk of about fifteen minutes we reach a notable old farm-house called Nan-y-mwyth, which nestles peacefully under the hill of Bettws Tir Iarll, where I lived for some time. A little higher up Ton-y-Bettws is reached, then down to Pandy, once the home of that master bard, Ieuan Bradford, who gave lessons on Reolan Bardas to Will Hopkin, Iolo Morganwg, and others of the Beird Tir Iarll.

Pandy is still in a good state of preservation after bearing very many winters, and an aspect of stability is impressed on the beholder when he comes into view the impressive thickness of its walls. But it is a crying disgrace that the old fulling mill building and Tynedy is now going into total ruin. Bradford's house is now in the hands of a Mr. William Hall, and long may it shelter him.

The truth must be owned: my trouble about writing about my native parish was to know what to

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mention and what not to mention. Every inch of ground from Llwyniorath and Nantymwth to Ton y Bettws is sacred to me. Well I remember plodding through the snow and sleet, on the back of my grandfather's old mare 'Brown,' to the 'old' mill at Pandy, where our corn was ground and was subsequently made into good 'Bara gwenith.' I have benefited in good health until this day having been fed on it.



Some history of Bryngarw and the Trehearne family, set up in Y Nyth, Bryngarw Park, before the visitors arrived, on Jubilee weekend.

To connect with Edward Thomas' article, an older reference to the Pandy area, by David Dimmick

GUNS OVER PANDY

Situated at Pandy in the lower Garw Valley was a fortified mansion of the Tudor period called Plas Bettws which was the seat of the Thomas family, who despite being of seemingly humble origins became one of the most prominent and influential families in the area.

An apparent example of their origins is recorded in Clarke's Genealogies of Glamorgan. Lewis Thomas, berated by his neighbours at Margam for being the son of a cooper, was sent by them a cask to be hooped, which Lewis sent on to London ordering it to be hooped in gold, then left his detractors at Margam to pay for it! One can imagine the looks on their faces when they received the bill!

The Thomas family attained prominence during the 17th century when Lewis Thomas of Bettws in Tir larll became High Sheriff of Glamorgan in 1611 and in 1623. His son, Sir Edward Thomas, being a

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staunch royalist during the Civil War was reputed to have been a leader of the Peace Army during an attack on Cardiff, which incurred the wrath of the equally staunch Cromwellian Sir Philip Jones of Fon Mon, who aided by cannon borrowed from Cromwell's army bombarding Coity Castle, laid siege to Plas Bettws. The cannon were positioned on a mound across the river and firing at such close range must have inflicted considerable damage on the mansion. It was undoubtedly a terrifying ordeal for any occupants of the building.

Following the Civil War, Plas Bettws fell into disrepair and eventually became a ruin, the only remaining architecture being the former stables, now a picturesque farmhouse, although the outline of the foundation walls are visible on Google maps. Plas Bettws is also featured in maps of the 18th and 19th centuries and perhaps earlier ones.

The Thomas family line apparently ended in 1827 with the death of William Morgan Thomas, although they did marry into the nearby Bradford family, see the following snippet on Siôn Bradford.

Siôn (John) Bradford, 1706-1785

Siôn Bradford, the 'Poet of Betws', 'Tir Iarll', resident of Bradford Cottage in the Garw Valley, was one of a small circle of literary men in that district during the early part of the eighteenth century.

A weaver, a fuller, and a dyer, he belonged to a family which had moved from Bradford on Avon in the previous century. As a young man he had studied the bardic tradition and collected Welsh manuscripts. His own verse is not important, but Iolo Morgannwg, (Edward Williams), who received instructions from him as an heir to the Druidic and Bardic system, which Iolo insisted had persisted over the centuries in Tir Iarll, maintained that it was in Bradford's manuscripts he had found much of the material which was later shown to be of his own invention.



A Red Kite over the Garw

A bit about us:

GARW VALLEY HERITAGE SOCIETY

We are a group of enthusiastic volunteers who got together in 2009 because of concern that with the closure of the mines and associated industries the history of the valley would disappear too.

We formed the Garw Valley Heritage Society (GVHS), with Chairman, Secretary, Treasurer, photographer and archivists, researcher, and a website manager. Meetings are held currently on the first Thursday evening of every month at 7pm in the Vestry of Tabernacle Chapel in Meadow Street, Pontycymer, and anyone is welcome. Membership fees at present are £5 annual membership, with £1 paid by members at monthly meetings.

In recent times (before lockdown!) the Society has held demonstrations of its materials at various fetes and community events within the Borough, as well as being involved with heritage planning with Bridgend Council. Members have also helped the local schools with projects involving the history of the valley and have conducted walks along routes that some more famous residents have walked, such as Richard Price in Llangeinor, and Daniel James of Blaengarw. In 2013 we have started to produce quarterly newsletters which display photographs and give stories and memories donated by Garw people, and throughout 2014-2018 we set up exhibitions throughout the Valley to remember the First World War and its effects on the Garw.

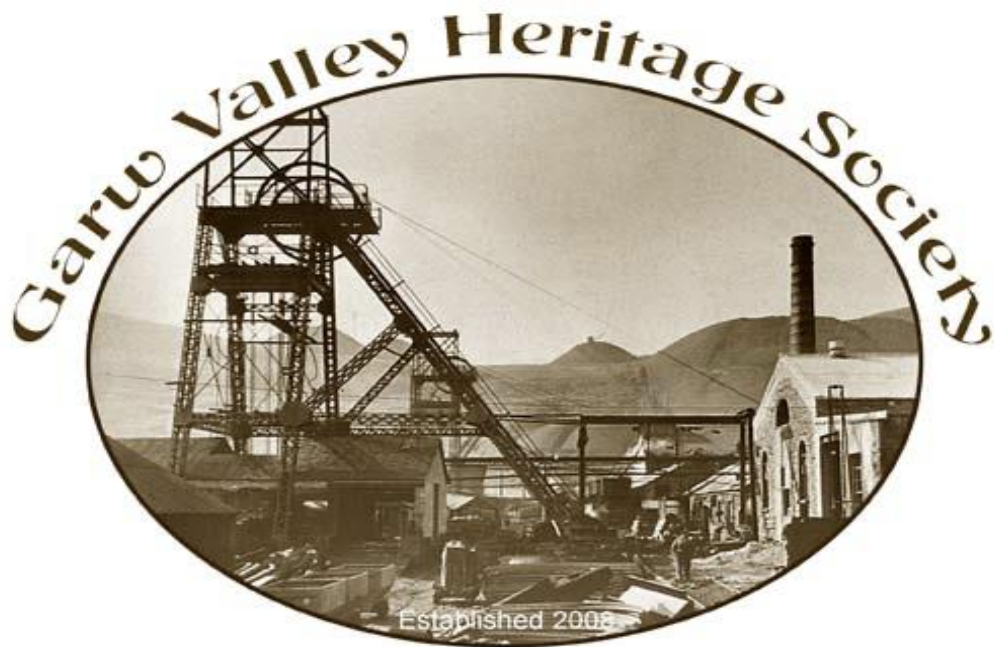
Early in 2019 we became a registered charity under charity number 1187117, with the help of Bridgend Association of Voluntary Organisations (BAVO), and this will give us credibility when applying for help and grants. We are currently working with the Garw Valley Railway to obtain a grant for the setting up of a Heritage Centre in the Garw, something which will bring prestige to the valley as well as provide future generations with a resource for knowledge of its industrial history and its social, religious, and cultural life.

All our archive material, books and tapes are currently held in Tabernacle, in rooms above the Vestry, where work will continue to catalogue material with the aim of making it accessible to the people of the Garw and anyone with an interest in local history.

Our present membership inevitably is ageing, and we would love to see younger people coming to join us and help carry on the work we have started, and to ensure our records are kept for posterity. Learning about our own past and collecting material for our archives is a fascinating and worthwhile process, and new members will be warmly welcomed with enthusiasm.

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If you would like to join, or would like more information, please contact Secretary Jean Fowlds on 01656 856091, and visit our



website www.garwheritage.co.uk, or come along to our next meeting!

Keep an eye out for news of a summer event in the Community Centre Pontycymer, and at the William Trigg Centre, Blaengarw, where we will be staging further exhibitions.

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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Email us enquiry@garwheritage.co.uk



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