

# Garw Valley Heritage Society Newsletter



## Croeso i Gaeaf 2022/3



Welcome to our Winter Newsletter, hopefully finding you all relieved that the threat of Covid seems to be subsiding, although there are difficult times ahead for all of us on the economic front. For this edition we have some Christmas childhood memories from Roy Davies, and the ups and downs of childhood carol-singing from Gerald Jarvis. Our archives have thrown up another Christmas item, this time a soldier's poem from the trenches of WW1 regretting the lack of beer, printed in the Glamorgan Gazette in 1916.

Included also, a reminder of our mining heritage, and a note to say that 2023 will be the tercentenary of the birth of Richard Price. Several institutions such as the Senedd, BBC, Cardiff University and others will be marking this with events throughout the year, and the GVHS will be holding its own exhibition too- see below.

Therefore for the festive season, on behalf of us all at GVHS, we wish you happy and peaceful times with your family and friends.

**NADOLIG LLAWEN A BLWYDDYN NEWYDD DDA I CHI GYD**

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## CHRISTMAS MEMORIES

Roy Davies



The big difference between now and then – the war years and just after – is that Christmas never lasted so long as it seems to these days.

Bonfire night took much longer and had much more going for it: the excitement of collecting and storage, the fear that rivals might steal your best stuff, the incredible tension of lying on top of mounds of combustible rubbish listening for sounds of approaching marauders while the valley winds whistled through the many cracks of wall and roof. And then came the construction of the fire itself and the ritual lighting once darkness fell. We were in charge of our own destiny from that moment until we kicked apart the still smoking embers before going to school the following morning with pockets stuffed with the carcasses of dead bangers and Catherine wheels which had had their brief moments of stardom the previous evening to various shouts of 'be careful' and 'you'll have someone's eye out' as fireworks flew back and forth over the flames.

Health and safety legislation surely began with similar cries of women the world over.

Christmas, by contrast was tame. A carol service, a few bits of crepe trimming and last year's cards brought out yet again to augment the few that genuinely arrived each year and a depressing counting of pennies enough for two Wills Whiffs for my father after his demob and some Snowfire cold cream for my mother. Then Christmas Eve was on us without warning. No tree, no lights, just two nylon stockings hanging down from the high wooden mantelpiece either side of a roaring coal fire banked half-way up the chimney breast and throwing out so much heat that it bounced back off the combed varnish wall and door to the narrow passage some ten feet away.

How presents came I never knew. Money was extremely short but something we had wished for always turned up. My brother wanted a six-shooter and holster: they arrived in a bag, unwrapped. For some cricket mad reason, I had declared a need for a set of stumps and bails without which life would not be worth living. I had already – the previous year – asked for and received from Father Christmas a cricket bat with a Don Bradman autograph I had seen in a local shop. Now I wanted the rest of the gear. I had ambition. I knew there were few places in our valley to lay out a straight six feet wicket which didn't slope one way or another but I was obsessed. How could I ever play for Glamorgan if I didn't practice with the right gear?

And there, one year on Christmas morning was a brown paper parcel with not quite enough paper to cover all six full-size stumps. But we knew the score. Empty the stockings first – despite the fact that we could see everything inside them through the nylon mesh: in the toe a coke from a previous domestic fire, then a penny coin, then an orange, then a small brown packet with two ends of cricket bails sticking out, then an apple, then another orange, a small bar of chocolate, a pine cone and another apple. My brother's was identical but where I had bails he had caps for his gun.

The whole ritual took less than a few minutes – stumps and all.

Then, before walking down to his club for his Christmas drink, my father would pull us closer to the fire for his annual chat to Father Christmas who, for some reason, had decided to stay in our chimney rather than that of someone further down the hill. And then despite the flames, the heat, the smoke and the regular falls of soot my father would pretend he was talking to Father Christmas. It was a conversation we felt was always extremely one-sided. We never heard a response from further up the chimney but we had no doubt he was up there, waiting, with his boots and his red suit about to combust into flames. My father would ask 'Do you have a present for this boy? And apparently he heard Father Christmas say that he did because my father would then stick his arm up the chimney close to the flames and heat to grab the small gift handed down to him from far above. We each had two goes and the smell of singed human hair decreased as the long hair on my father's arm quickly disappeared. The presents were always the same, a tiny wooden horse, a china dog, a small Spitfire aeroplane and a model of a field gun.

But it wasn't the fact that they appeared year after year via the same short, and what must have been a very painful, handover between a man in a red suit and black boots and a tattoo-ed ex-soldier. We accepted that as an annual ritual of wonder. No. It was the fact that in that short, wonderful spell between daylight and Christmas dinner in our tiny house high above the waking valley our home, apparently, was the only place where magic constantly happened between two grown men and two small boys.

The yearly spell, though, was easily broken. Invariably when we sat down to Christmas dinner there were only three of us at the table. My father's dinner was in the oven keeping warm. He never called it that but apparently there was also a great deal of magic going on in his club.



CAROLLING in my YOUTH  
Gerald Jarvis (no apologies for reprinting from 2017)



As a (quite often) penniless child there were a few ways one could achieve financial stability, and Christmas Carolling was one of them. Of course it required a good strong voice and a varied repertoire if you were to go solo, and it could be very rewarding.

Singing in a group though had its problems, one of them being you had to share the monies out at the end of the session. What carols and length they should be were discussed, and then whether to knock first and burst into 'Once in Royal David's City' when the door was opened, or sing the first verse of 'Good King Wenceslas' and then knock. All these things needed to be factored in.

Choosing the streets, and even which side of the street, was important. With three-storied valley houses, there was no point in knocking the door, as most people lived in the bottom storey, and then they had to come up one flight of stairs to answer the door, usually out of breath.

If you were lucky you could call at a house which was just putting up their trimmings and decorations, so a quick burst of 'We Wish you a Merry Christmas' could net you a Shilling. (5p)

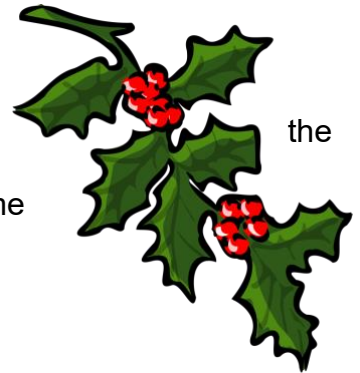
Often you would be asked for requests for old favourites, and this paid more for sentimental reasons. An evening carolling had its pitfalls, one of which was having members of the choir having



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to be 'in' by a certain time, but normally this disruption could be countered by co-opting a passing child. Of course the one leaving would demand their share out for services rendered so far; stopping to do this every so often was not unusual.

Another obstacle was the Fish & Chip shops, of which the Garw had abundance, and these shops would just be opening for the evening and their smells hung heavily on the air, resulting in a minor mutiny carolling ranks and demands for a share out to purchase threepennyworth, or a bag of 'scratchings' at the next chippie we come to.



### A TEETOTAL CHRISTMAS. Glamorgan Gazette 7/1/16

Last year in comfort and good cheer,  
We swanked in civvy clothes,  
All blooming gentlemen of worth,  
Who slept in soft repose;

Today beneath the German guns,  
At any rate near enough,  
We wait in Flanders for the Huns -  
Christmas, without Plum Duff.

Cambria's mountains, phantoms faint,  
Come to us in dreams;  
The little village on the hill,  
The woodland and the streams.

Now in front, or somewhere near,  
Marooned without one plea,  
In a brewery without the beer,\*  
And very little tea.

When Christmas comes a year from now,  
No Flanders mud for me,  
No brewery without the beer,  
No dishes full of tea.

But then we shall have thrashed the Huns,  
Or sent them straight to Heaven,  
And home to glory we shall march,  
Our noble Twenty Seven.\*\*

\* 27 was the number of the 77<sup>th</sup> Sanitary Section of the Welsh Division.

\*\* Staff Sergeant Evans was billeted in a bombed out brewery at the time of writing this.

NB This was written of his time- we would probably not like to use the then-popular term for the Germans today!





## THE BATTLE OF MYNYDD LLANGEINOR.

A quote from the *Archeologica Cambrensis* states that 'A battle is supposed to have taken place on Mynydd Llangeinor, where a number of Breconians were slain, including their leader, Dafydd Tudor Ky. (sic) They had been pursued there by the men of Llangeinor, after the slaying of one Jenkyn Mathew, at Cowbridge and they having rifled and spoiled the Michaelmas Fair at Ewenny.'

Researching the facts of this event, which happened in much older times, was not going to be easy. Traditionally Michaelmas fair in this area was held at St Mary Hill, 4 miles north of Bridgend, a full 6 miles from Llangeinor church, which in turn is 30 miles from Brecon (as the crow flies).

Michaelmas Fair was a substantial event in the agricultural calendar, and attracted visitors from all over the surrounding counties, so it would not be unusual for a band of Breconians to be there. How or why Jenkyn Mathew was killed at Cowbridge is not known; it is known that he was of good family and related to some very highly placed personages in the Vale. If the death of Jenkyn was down to these visitors, and their getaway route was possibly through the fair at Ewenny, where a hue & cry was raised.



Hue and Cry (from the Norman French *huer* to harry, and *crier*, to shout), was an edict from the Statute of Winchester of 1292 in the time of Edward I, and was 'an obligation by anybody, on seeing a crime committed, to pursue the perpetrator/s until they were brought to justice, or face prosecution themselves.'

A Constable and Shire Reeve were supposed to head this 'posse' to give it some legality, but often people would just take it upon themselves to chase after the 'criminals' and mete out a bit of summary justice until the Shire-Reeve caught up. The men of Llangeinor would probably have had a lot of old scores to settle because the men from Brecon were constantly raiding into this part of the country, that is presumably why no quarter was given in this bloody event!

When this incident ended on top of Llangeinor mountain the roads here were no more than trackways or drovers' roads at best with no inhabitants for miles. Newly discovered writings about the aftermath of this battle tell us that a local man, David ap Jenkyn ap Evan, of Braichycymmer, went off to fetch his team of oxen and a great cart and took it to the battle site and 'gathered up the bodies and took them to the Church of St Cein, for a Christian burial, and were buried in a heap in the north part of the churchyard.'

This church's graveyard has never been extended, and there is indeed a raised area exactly in the North corner.

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## **RICHARD PRICE of Llangeinor**

It was on February 23<sup>rd</sup> in 2023, 300 years ago, that Richard Price was born in TynTon in Llangeinor, in the house that is still standing today, although much modified. He was one of the formative minds of the eighteenth century Enlightenment. He is the founder of modern Life Assurance, he became a Fellow of the Royal Society for his work in mathematics and philosophy, and wrote many papers on the political rights we enjoy today. He gave his support and advice to Benjamin Franklin and the American revolutionaries, then later to the French.

He was an advisor to William Pitt on the National Debt, advocated an early form of the EU and NATO, an extension of voting rights, and an end to slavery.

As a mark of respect and admiration for this great man, the Garw Valley Heritage Society, together with the Richard Price Society, will be holding an exhibition dedicated to his life and achievements- details to be advertised on the website and on social media.

Place: Llangeinor, the Richard Price Centre, Date: late February, but TBA

At the point of writing we understand that several other commemorative events will also be taking place throughout the year, both locally and in London, where he spent much of his working life.

**Watch out for more information!!!**

## **A DESCRIPTION OF BETTWS PARISH IN 1836,**

Taken from: Samuel Lewis; Topography & History of Wales Vol. I. (1838)

BETTWS is a parish, in the union of Bridgend and Cowbridge, the Hundred of Newcastle, county of Glamorgan, South Wales. 5 miles North of Bridgend; containing 362 inhabitants. This parish is pleasantly situated on the river Ogmore, and is watered by the rivulet of the Llynfi and the Garw Rivers, which bound it on two sides. The surrounding scenery is pleasing and picturesque, and in the immediate neighbourhood are some handsome seats.

COYTRHENE, the seat of Morgan Popkin Traherne, Esq., Is a handsome Mansion, occupying a retired but agreeable situation on the declivity of a hill, surrounded by luxuriant plantations with the river Llynfi flowing at its base, and commanding a beautiful view of the surrounding country. It was anciently the property of the Powells, from whom it passed by marriage to the family of Popkin and Traherne. Within half a mile of Coytrahene, a small but elegant house of the Elizabethan style has recently been erected at Bryngarw, Brynmeyn, under the direction of Mr Traherne, for his sister, the widow of the late George Jenner; of Doctors Commons.

The parish abounds with excellent coal, which lately was procured only for the supply of the inhabitants of this district, but a vein has been opened up by a John Edwards Vaughan, Esq., of Rheola, Neath, which for the readier conveyance of which, a tram road has been constructed by that same gentleman, communicating with the railroad leading from Bridgend to Porthcawl.

The 'living' is a perpetual curacy, annexed to the vicarage in Newcastle, Bridgend, which is endowed with the rectoral tithes of this parish. The Church is dedicated to St David, and is not distinguished by any great architectural features. There is also a place for worship for Unitarians, which has a small endowment. Here is a Day School. In which about twelve children are instructed at their parents' own expense.

The Coytrahene estate is at present charged with an annual payment of £2.00, and £1.10s per annum is secured by deed poll on Bridgend Turnpike Trust, for distribution amongst the poor. The total parochial rates for March 25<sup>th</sup> 1836 amounted to £156, of which £100.5s was for the relief of the poor, £20.12s towards county rates, and £33.3s, for incidental charges.

## AN APPRECIATION OF THE MINER

F. E . Popham.

There are various occupation in this world of din and strife,  
And the struggles, they are many, to meet the needs of life.  
We move along like busy bees in this bog industrial hive,  
And it somehow seems miraculous how all of us seem to thrive.

But of all the many callings, there is one that all can say,  
That their lives are held in jeopardy all through the dreary day.  
Deprived of natural air, and robbed of all its light,  
They that earn their daily bread in a place as black as night;

Down in the bowels of the earth, away from all sunshine,  
For Mothers, Wives and Children, they toil down in the mine.  
Without the aid of these splendid men, our key industries would die,  
Our engines, and our Navies, too, though with oil they've had a try;

The happy homes of Britain would lack the joy and mirth  
If the much talked of Miner did not keep a cheerful hearth.  
His sacrifices are many, and oft times we are told  
That beneath the grime of coal dust beats many a heart of gold.

Now and again we are reminded, and then the Nation stirs  
To read of brave heroic deeds when a mine explosion occurs:  
How men will volunteer, with their lives almost in their hand,  
To save their fellow-comrades they will form a little band;

They descend the mine with courage that shall forever last,  
Although, perhaps an hour before, 'twas the scene of a terrible blast.  
In the recent mine explosion that just took place in Wales, \*  
We have been given proof of their bravery in tales

Of how many risked their lives, if possible, to save  
Their pals, comrades, yes, brothers, too, from such an awful grave.  
We have listened, too, with sympathy of children who are left  
Fatherless, and who perhaps in future of pleasure will be bereft,

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Of Mothers, Wives, and Sweethearts, who sadly will recall  
That the mine to them will forever be a funeral pall.  
So when you hear, as you will do, of the Miner being a cad,  
Think that amongst the Miners, there some not really bad.

And when seated by your fireside, and you see the coal's red glare,  
Just give a thought to the Miner, and for him say a prayer.

\*(we are not sure which disaster this refers to)

## WHAT WE HAVE BEEN DOING

***It's been good to find that slowly some things are getting back to normal, and during the Autumn we were able to have an 'open house' for displaying some of our photographs and articles in both Tabernacle and in Dan-y-Mynydd, the William Trigg Centre. During the Summer we were able to open up in Bryngarw Park for the Queen's jubilee, but then sadly of course the Queen's death followed on not long afterwards, so we managed a small display of royal memorabilia as a tribute.***

***Since then we have been busy updating our exhibition material to give a more professional look, and carrying on the archiving of the large amount of material still to be labelled and filed properly. Preparation is in hand for the Richard Price exhibition planned for February onwards in the Garw later in the year (see above).***



### TYLLAGWYN CHAPEL

It is sad to relate that this chapel will be closing on December 16<sup>th</sup>, its final service at 11.30am.

Tyilagwyn Chapel is the oldest chapel in the valley, having opened in 1831 as Craig Wen Particular Baptist Cwmgarw. It was renamed in the 1880s after enlargement as Tyllagwyn Baptist Chapel.

Older Garw residents have many tales to tell of its early days, and Heulwen Llywellyn, now deceased, remembered the days when Tyllagwyn chapel held summer teas, which were followed by races down by the riverside near this spot, just upriver from the station house. Food and tea would be served in the chapel first, then they would all go down to the river for sporting activities on a flat piece of ground on the riverbank. For the tea party boards would be put on the back of the chapel's pews to form tables. Some people had to kneel up on the pews to get their food whilst others sat on the seats.

NB Anyone attending the final service on December 16<sup>th</sup> should wrap up well, as there is no heating there now.

