

Garw Valley Heritage Society Newsletter



Croeso i Haf 2023

Welcome to Summer 2023. This edition starts with photos of some of the preparation that took place for the King's coronation on May 6th, followed by two contrasting articles on the Betws of over 100 years ago, a piece on the life and times of Miss FM Thomas and the current attempts to gain recognition for her by way of a plaque. As usual there is a paragraph about what we have been doing as well as some dates for our next events, at which we hope many of you will be able to come along.



Preparation for the coronation- David Street, and the Blaengarw Arms with people arriving for celebration tea whilst watching on the big screen.

BETTWS, HOME OF THE AWENYDDION. (BARDS)

From the diary of Mr. Edward Thomas J.P. (Cochfarf), 30/09/1910

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 larll, the rendezvous of the Bards of Glamorgan. Follow me from Tondu 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 larll, 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 Beirdd Tir larll.

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 Tynerdy 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 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.

NOTES ON THE AUTHOR: *Edward Thomas was born in 1853 in the farmhouse of Nantymwth in Shwt, nr Bettws, and educated in Bettws, before moving at age 10 with his family to Melin Ifan Ddu when his father died. In 1876 he went to work as a carpenter at Hengoed before going to Cardiff to work on the old Cardiff Town Hall in St Mary Street, a building he came to know well when he became a Cardiff Borough councillor in 1890, and elected mayor in 1902. His nickname Cochfarf came from his red hair or beard.*

He served as one of the secretaries of the National Eisteddfod when it was held in Cardiff in 1879; in 1880 he joined the staff of the Cardiff Coffee Tavern Company, but left to open his own coffee tavern when the Cardiff Coffee Tavern decided to open on Sundays- a move he strongly disapproved of. He later opened the Metropole, opposite the Taff Vale Railway Station, and the Red Dragon in the docks.

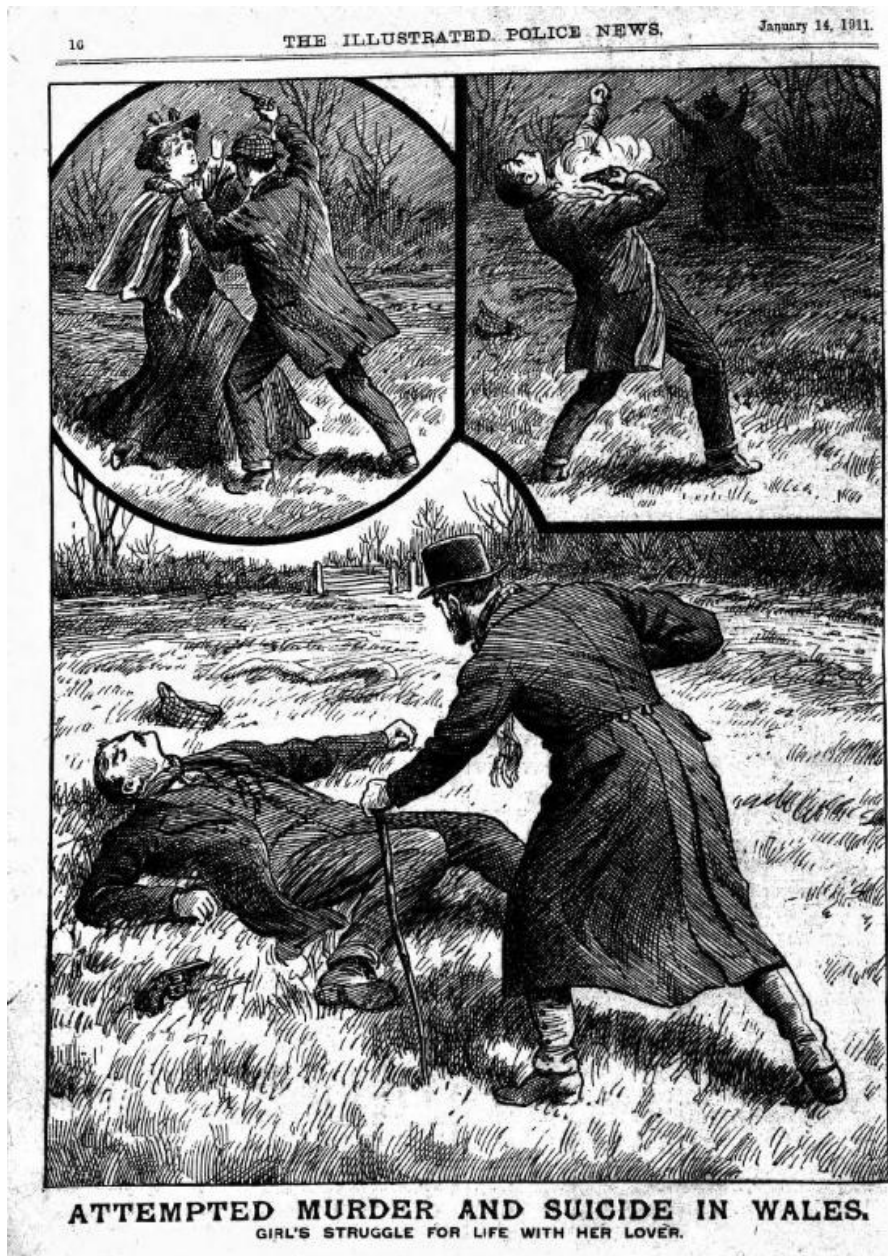
He was deeply interested in history and antiquities, was a staunch Baptist and a liberal, and worked hard for the disestablishment of the Church in Wales and was a member of the Society for the Preservation of the Welsh Language. His Coffee Tavern was the place where the society known as 'Cymmrodorion Caerdydd' was formed.

Edward Thomas died on November 18th 1912.

Acknowledgements: Sir William Llwellyn Davies and the Dictionary of Welsh National Biography.

A TEMPORARY MADNESS: BETTWS 1911.

Gerald Jarvis (from contemporary newspaper sources).



While returning his sweetheart home, a miner in the Garw Valley, Glamorgan, was suddenly seized with a fit of madness, and pulling out a revolver fired twice at his fiance and then turned the weapon on himself with fatal consequences.

The deceased was Leonard Penton Beavis, 31. of Pandy Bettws, and for nearly seven years he had been courting Elisabeth Bailey, 28, who resides in her brothers house in Bettws, both parents being dead.

On the day of the tragedy

Miss.Bailey had spent the day at her fiance's home, he appeared to be in good spirits and had even sung two songs to her in the early evening.

At 10 o'clock. They left the house, Beavis accompanying his fiance through the field towards her home 3/4 of a mile away. They had not gone far when Beavis stopped her asking to see if her cape was fastened, at the same time pushing her off the pathway towards the middle of the field.

He repeated the question, and reaching toward her pulled at her cape. The young lady was startled by this and pushed his hand away, as she did this, Beavis drew a revolver from his coat pocket and fired it at her head.

This bullet fortunately missed. Beavis, then shouted "I'll have no more of this."and fired the pistol again, this time she felt an impact on her shoulder and started to struggle with him for possession of the weapon, all the time screaming for assistance, but her cries went unheard. Now, fearing for her life she broke loose and ran towards her home. When she was about 100 yards away she heard another shot.

Miss.Bailey ran to a neighbour's home and took shelter there until her brother came to fetch her. When she got home she went to change her clothes for bed, a spent bullet fell from her clothing.

The following morning Beavis's step-father Mr.William Hall, and P.C. John Owen came to enquire as to the whereabouts of Beavis, as he had not returned home. Elisabeth Bailey related the incident to them and they went to look for her attacker.

They retraced her steps, and found the lifeless body of Leonard Beavis in the middle of the field, shot through the heart. The pistol, a six-chambered revolver with three discharged cartridges and Elisabeth's fur cape lay on the ground beside him.

At a Coroners Inquest, the jury were advised to give a verdict of *felo de se*.* But they disregarded this instruction and passed a verdict of ' Suicide while temporarily insane."

* *felo de se*. One who commits a deliberately malicious act and then commits suicide.

WHAT WE HAVE BEEN DOING-----

DONATIONS We have recently been given collections of papers, photographs and other memorabilia from various local people, including decades-old records of the attendances and events at TylaGwyn chapel, sadly now closed. All have been acknowledged and are being assessed as to the best way to keep for posterity: **these items do not belong to us, they belong to everybody in the Garw**, so we are constantly working on ways to make them accessible to present and future generations.

NOTABLE GARW CITIZENS--We have been approached by author Ryland Wallace (see below) on behalf of the Purple Plaque Society, which aims to bring recognition of the important roles women have had within the history of Wales. They would like GVHS support to obtain a Purple Plaque to mark the achievements of Frances Margaret Thomas, Garw Headmistress, Councillor, Trade Unionist, and supporter of Women's

Suffrage. We are delighted to offer support, and we will be relating news of the application's progress in due course. Please see the back page for details of the Purple Plaque scheme, and see Ryland Wallace's brief biography of Miss FM Thomas (Fannie Bloomers, as she was known to some), below.

FARMS OF THE GARW- Linda and Chris have started on a long-term project of gaining as much information as possible on the farming life of the Garw, before, during, and after the advent of the coal mines. To date they have amassed a list of 74 different farms that have been in existence from many years ago, and are busy trying to find out how many are still standing and what has happened to those that are no longer here. This may be something that requires much help so any information that readers can pass on will be most welcome.

HISTORY MONTH AT THE LIBRARIES- Roger and Jean have been meeting with the head of Awen's Heritage Development Manager, Stefanie Van Stokkom, in connection with liaising with them in any future displays they want to hold for their History Months in the Borough's libraries.

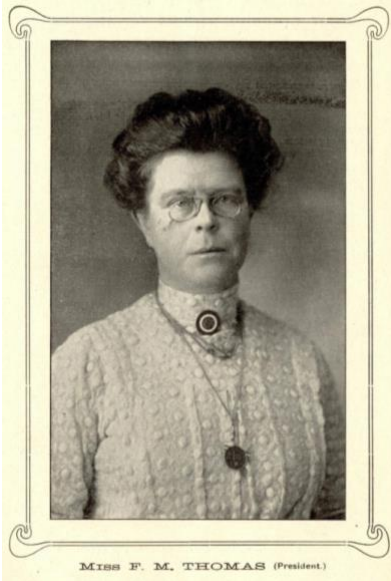
We are keen to borrow historical material that can be indexed and copied with the consent of the owner, and would be grateful for any photos, family recollections, funny stories, tales of excitement or adventure in the Valley.

DATES FOR THE DIARY-----

FRIDAY AUGUST 4TH , 10am-4pm at the Richard Price Centre in Llangeinor: A further exhibition on the Life and Times of Richard Price for those who were unable to come along in February. We will be welcoming special visitors from Port Talbot, but all are welcome. Refreshments provided. Free admission.

SATURDAY SEPTEMBER 16TH, 10am-4pm at Tabernacle in Pontycymmer, Cadw Open Doors event: Richard Price will be featured alongside Daniel James of Calon Lan fame, and other notable Garw personalities and events. Of special interest that day will be our guest Graham Holcombe, organist and retired canon of Llandaff Cathedral who will play the organ at Tabernacle and also give a talk on the organ itself, which is one of the very few organs of its type that are still in use amongst the working organs that still exist in the South Wales places of worship.

LATE SEPTEMBER: dates TBA- Blaengarw Workmen's Hall will be the scene of playwright Vic Mills' play celebrating the philosophy of Richard Price, but more information will be advertised nearer the time.



Fannie Margaret Thomas (1868-1952): Brief Biography Ryland Wallace

Born in Dolgellau in 1868, the daughter of a bank worker, Fannie was educated at board schools in Aberystwyth and Cowbridge. Her father died young (aged 38), by which time she and her mother and five siblings were already living with her maternal grandfather, who was a publican in Cowbridge. Fannie became a pupil teacher in the town, before going on to Swansea Training College where she qualified as a teacher. Thereafter, she taught at several schools before being appointed headmistress of the Ffaldau School, at Pontycymer, in 1895. Here she remained until her retirement in 1931, at the age of sixty-three. (She is far right, 2nd row, in photo below).

Thus ended a long and dedicated teaching career. But this was hardly unremarkable. What made Fannie Margaret Thomas distinctive and exceptional was that alongside her teaching career, she pursued a passionate commitment to feminist and political activism. In particular, she was a pioneering trade unionist, a suffragette, and one of the very early female councillors in Wales.

Trade Unionist: The inequalities between male and female teachers that Fannie experienced in her early teaching career led her into feminist trade unionism. She became one of the early stalwarts of the 'Equal Pay League', subsequently the 'National Federation of Women Teachers', on its formation in 1904. This was a pressure group within the National Union of Teachers (NUT) and comprised the militant women members of the profession. In 1912 she became the first Welshwoman to be its President. In 1920 it broke away from the male-dominated and intransigent NUT to form the independent 'National Union of Women Teachers'.

Suffragette:
Fannie was
ardent advocate



of women's suffrage and used every avenue to advance the cause. By instinct, she was attracted to the militant wings on the movement – Mrs Pankhurst Women's Social and Political, the Women's Freedom League and the Cymric Suffrage Union. She was member of three of these, but also gave her support to the law-abiding National Union of Women Suffrage's Society.

Urban District Councillor: After the achievement of partial women's suffrage in 1918, Fannie devoted her energies in public affairs to local politics. In 1919, she became not only the first woman to serve on the Ogmere and Garw Urban District Council but also the first elected Labour woman councillor in Wales. She was to be returned at the next five triennial elections, retiring in 1937, having served for eighteen years and been 'Madame Chairman' during the year 1928-9, the first woman to hold that position on the council (and the first Labour woman to be elected chair of a council in Wales). She proved a committed and conscientious representative and made a major contribution to the advance of public health services, including maternity and child welfare provision.

Fannie's colourful, rather eccentric, personality no doubt contributed to her aura. The first woman in the Garw Valley to wear breeches earned her the nickname 'Fanny Bloomers', while she was reputedly the first woman in South Wales to ride a motorcycle. Both may be seen as feminist statements, as can the story that Fannie would go into the public bar at the Royal Hotel in Pontycymer and refuse all requests to remove herself to the ladies' lounge, before drinking a pint of beer and then leaving. She died at her home in Porthcawl in July 1952 at the age of eighty-four.

NOTE: for more information on Miss Thomas and the suffragette cause in Wales, see 'The Women's Suffrage Movement in Wales, 1866-1928', by Ryland Wallace, published by the University of Wales Press, Cardiff.

SUMMER PHOTOGRAPHS-- My recent riverside walk down the Garw showed, amongst others, the scarlet pimpernel, and aquilegia, which is poisonous and used in olden times to produce rat poison. (G. Jarvis, photos by Colin Simper).





About Purple Plaques / Ynglŷn â'r Placiau Porffor

Purple Plaques was launched on International Women's Day 2017, by a group of volunteers who felt the need for more recognition for the contribution women make to Welsh life.

The campaign aims to shine a light on women's achievements by improving the recognition of remarkable women in Wales. The award of a Purple Plaque will showcase and honour women across Wales. These Welsh women will have made an impact in Wales or beyond and may previously have gone uncelebrated or have been left out of the history books entirely.

There are currently an estimated 250 mainly blue plaques commemorating notable figures in Wales, and only a few of these are female. Purple Plaques aims to address this inequality and give women a prominent place in history.

The Purple Plaques Wales Committee is an independent group of volunteers, currently intending to seek funding, and working together with communities and the public to carry out our aims. It is hoped that people all over Wales will see this as an opportunity to remember and honour our remarkable women. We invite the public to propose remarkable Welsh women for consideration of a Purple Plaque.



For more information on the Garw Valley Heritage Society, please see our website, details left, and you can follow us on Facebook and Twitter. For enquiries and correspondence, please contact Secretary Jean Fowlds, jeaningarw@talktalk.net tel. 01656 856091