



AUTUMN NEWSLETTER 2023



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CROESO!

WELCOME TO OUR AUTUMN 2023 NEWSLETTER.

This edition includes an item by Alan Jones about his great grandfather Llewellyn Jones, who amongst his many achievements was involved with Aneurin Bevan and the plans to set up a National Health Service; it's worth printing as a reminder of the NHS' 75th anniversary this year. Some correspondence follows with stories about a cat who didn't live up to expectations, some disappearing pots of paint, and some research into former businesses in Blaengarw, and requests for information on some of the old farms of the Garw. As usual there is a section about what we have been doing as well as some dates for our forthcoming events. *Jean.*

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THE GARW VALLEY HERITAGE SOCIETY

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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.

LLEWELLYN JONES, A MAN OF MANY TALENTS

Alan Jones



LLEWELLYN JONES, my great grandfather (seen above, centre, with his family), was born in Llantwit Fadre in 1868. His parents Elias and Mary moved to Pontycymer when he was just 12 years old. Elias Jones was following his trade as a coal miner/shaft sinker, and this was the period of this valley's history when coal mining was coming to the fore. At the age of 13 Llewellyn is shown as a class monitor /teacher's aide at an unofficial school set up in the vestry of Bethel chapel: this was paid for in part by miners' contributions.

He stayed at school until he was 16 and left to work at the Garw Fechan pit before becoming an apprentice to the Ffaldau Colliery blacksmith. After qualifying from this apprenticeship Llewellyn went on to be a blacksmith for a further 30 years. In 1886 he applied for membership of the Rose of Garw lodge of the Oddfellows Society. This organisation was a benevolent society and provided at the time the only source of health and unemployment insurance amongst other things for their members.

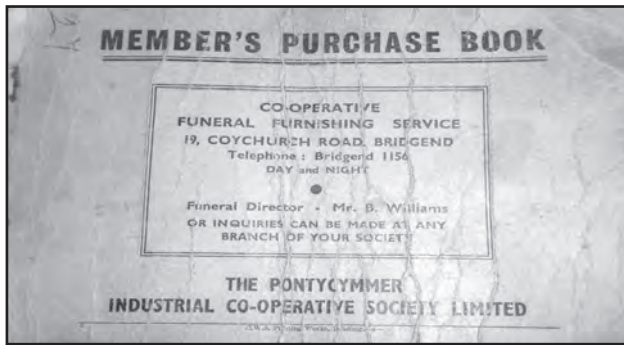
By all accounts Llewellyn was a most active and resourceful member because he was voted to be the Lodge secretary shortly after joining, and indeed after many years of service to the Oddfellows went on to become a National Grand Master in 1916.

In 1889 aged 21 he married 22 year-old Anne Williams. She was originally from Brynamman, but her family was now living in Lluest. The newlyweds moved in with his

recently widowed mother in 18 Alexandra Rd. While Llewellyn was working as a Blacksmith an incident occurred when it is reported that “One of the cages got caught up with an obstruction in the shaft”. The story goes that Llewellyn climbed down the shaft and while holding on with one hand freed the blockage with a sledgehammer and then climbed back up.

Anne Jones gave birth to their first child Elias John in 1892. The couple went on to have Arthur Llewellyn in 1895, Brinley William in 1898, and Towyn David in 1900. Unfortunately Towyn was to die 11 months later.

In 1902 Llewellyn became a founder member of the Pontycymmer Co-operative Society. He spent the next 30 years as a director of the Society helping to make it one of the richest co-operatives in the UK with an annual turnover of £1,000,000 pounds!



These were a way for people to buy whatever groceries they required from the Co-Op, with the amount spent entered and added up each week.

One elderly Garw resident remembers how, when she told her parents that she'd arranged her wedding date some 60

years ago, for September 14th, their reaction was not what she expected! “You can't have it then!” said her outraged mother, “The Co-op money doesn't come until the week after!”

In 1905 Llewellyn entered the world of local politics by being the first representative for Pontycymmer on the Garw Urban District Council. He went on to become the Chairman of this body 3 times in his 30 years of service.

In 1911 there were great changes throughout this country's industry. When the National Insurance Act was introduced, because the government were basing their calculations on the Oddfellows actuarial tables, Llewellyn Jones was very involved in ensuring the smooth running of this enterprise. Around this time he and Anne adopted a baby girl whose mother had died in childbirth, a child they called Nancy.

In 1913 Llewellyn became secretary of the newly formed Garw Medical Aid Society and he stayed in this role until it was adopted into the National Health Service in 1948. However it was not all 'plain sailing' for the G.M.A.S. The British Medical Council were anxious to prevent any of their members working for such organisations, and at one time Llewellyn had our the Welsh coalfields in a hired car to search for doctors willing to work for the Garw Medical Aid Society without fear of being struck off!

It is considered that Aneurin Bevan was the undisputed 'father' of the National Health Service in this country, but what is not so well known is that he had many meetings with Llewellyn Jones both in Pontycymmer and in Bevan's suite at the Seabank Hotel in Porthcawl. Bevan arranged these meetings so that he could draw on the advice of the man with over 30 years of practical knowledge in the field of public welfare.

1914-1918 were of course the years of the Great War and it was during this time that Llewellyn gave up his job as a colliery blacksmith and put all of his efforts into his growing number of positions in local government, and in doing so raising funds for the war effort.

In 1917 like many other families at this time they suffered a sad blow: the news came that their second son Arthur had been killed in action in Palestine on the 7th of May 1917 while serving with the RAMC, and had been buried out there.

During the Employers Lock-out of 1926 which lasted for 8 months Llewellyn Jones helped with others set up soup kitchens in the valley so that the poorer families, and single men in particular, could get at least one decent meal a day. At one time there were as many as 8 of these 'canteens' in the Garw: 3 in Blaengarw, 3 in Pontycymmer, 1 in Pontrhyll, and 1 in Llangeinor. They made it possible to feed upwards of 2,000 people with at least one meal a day. One of the 'soup kitchens' was for schoolchildren only and was run from the Ambulance Hall by one of Llewellyn's sons. Over this period it is calculated that the combined effort of all of these soup kitchens served up a total of 67,445 meals. The Lock-out had a devastating effect on the Garw valley, and many people moved away to try and find work elsewhere. Small businesses went bankrupt, the owners committing suicide because of debts incurred trying to support the local people.

Anne died aged 71 in July 1938. As a highly respected member of the community her funeral was attended by many people of the Garw. Her death was a great loss to Llewellyn and he retired from his position as a member of the Ogmor and Garw Urban Council but still busied himself with public works. He was a governor of the University College, Cardiff, as well as the local secondary schools; he became a trustee and secretary of the Memorial Hall, Pontycymmer, and he was also a magistrate and Deacon of Tabernacle chapel.

When the 1939-45 war broke out he busied himself with raising funds once again for the war effort by travelling around the South Wales coalfields giving speeches.

In 1948 at the launch of the National Health Service all of Llewellyn Jones's help and advice was rewarded by awarding him the post of Chairman of the first Glamorgan N.H.S. Executive. He was also offered a knighthood, but turned it down. This great man died at the age of 85, in February 1953. His funeral was not only attended by the great and the good, but also crowds of working class people who came to pay their respects to a man who had devoted his life to their welfare.

WHAT HAVE WE BEEN DOING?



RICHARD PRICE EXHIBITION

On August 4th a further exhibition on the Life and Times of Richard Price was held at the Richard Price centre in Llangeinor, for those who were unable to come along in February. Also featured were Daniel James (*Calon Lân*) and Fannie Thomas (Ffaldau School Head, Councillor and renowned Suffragist). We also re-played the recorded talk from February, between Huw Edwards and Professor Huw Williams. Special visitors were welcomed from Port Talbot, some with Garw roots, and we even met people who had especially come from Birmingham that morning. A very enjoyable day.

Grateful thanks are given to Deborah and Tammy, and all at the Richard Price Centre, for the use of the Hall.

PURPLE PLAQUE (Fannie Thomas)

The appeal for a Purple Plaque to honour Fannie Thomas is now with Huw Irranca Davies and we await a decision on behalf of the Purple Plaque society. Readers may refer to the last newsletter (Summer 2023) for more information on Miss Thomas, and for a reminder of the Purple Plaque Society's aims.

FARMS OF THE GARW

Linda and Chris are still working on this 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. We have just been given a donation to allow access to one of the genealogy sites which it is hoped will be a help. Progress will be reported on in

future newsletters, but anyone who feels they can help, please get in touch (contact details on page 2).

■ **Of current interest are the names found, but no location identified, of COEDANYN, CWMEDYM, GWENIGEN. Can anyone help with more information?**

PHOTOGRAPHS FOR SALE

Richard has been working on restoring a selection of Garw photographs from our archive. These will soon be available to buy in large (A4) and small (7x5 inches) format. To “test the waters” there will be an initial 12 available, and if there is interest we will add more. Many of these photographs have been donated to us by Garw families, or are in the public domain (but ours have been restored so are nicer than others you may find out there!). More recent ones taken by our photographer Colin may also become available. It does cost money to run this Society, so the intention of making these pictures available is to both raise funds and awareness of our cause.

BAVO

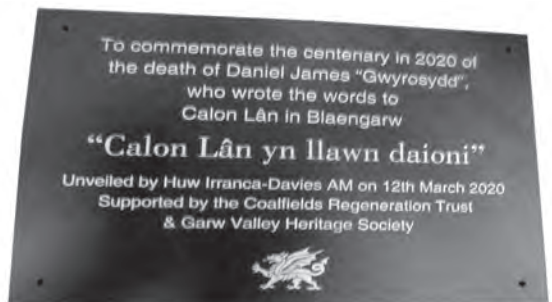
(Bridgend Association of Voluntary Organisations)



The GVHS is a member of BAVO, and on August 8th Alison and Claire from BAVO came to the Tabernacle Chapel to see what we are up to, and hear about plans for the future. Linda, Janet and Richard explained the archiving and digitising of much of our material, and we were able to show some of the exhibition boards and displays used in recent events. BAVO has promised ongoing support and will be highlighting future opportunities for funding in these straitened times.

DANIEL JAMES

Readers may remember that we at GVHS supported the aim of obtaining some public recognition of the fact that Daniel James wrote the words to *Calon Lân* in the Blaengarw Hotel, and a plaque was produced to be placed somewhere in Blaengarw. The plaque itself has



been kept in the constituency office of Huw Irranca Davies AM over the covid period, but we have recently been able to produce it at the last exhibition in the Richard Price centre, and rumour has it that the council will be wanting to place it in the Strand Parc at Blaengarw, next to the Hotel – so watch this space!

A SEVENTIES MYSTERY, (OR 50 SHEDS OF GREY)

Gerald Jarvis

Back in the 70's the old Washery at Blaengarw was demolished to make way for a more modern building.

I was lucky enough to get a job on the new site as a 'handyman/teaboy' which involved generally helping the site craftsmen, steel erectors, welders etc. The steel girder framework went together like a giant Meccano set. Once it was up the site boss asked me if I wanted some week-end work, painting the lot with primer; the paint was already stored in a lock-up on site.

Come the morning of the painting, the shed was opened and Lo and Behold the paint had vanished! The Police were called in, but after some desultory enquiries, nothing ever came of it.

More paint was ordered and the job was completed in time for the Brickies to start on the block work. It was funny though, and probably co-incidental, how on the hillsides surrounding us, it appeared that every shed and pigeons cote in the Garw were sporting a very fetching coat of grey primer for the next few years.

An item resulting from research that one of our correspondents has been doing:

NON-MINING TRADES AND OCCUPATIONS IN BLAENGARW

Colin T Davies

Just out of curiosity I would like to mention that I found Blaengarw Post Office was in Katie Street, where it still is: that there was an Electrical Masseur in Blaengarw Road; two or three Picke Manufacturers in The Strand; a Diploma-holding Certified Assistant Dispenser from the Society of Apothecaries, London, in Gwendoline Street; the manager of the Pontycymmer Hippodrome lived in Tymeinwr Avenue; a Refreshment House-keeper in The Strand; I found there was also a Lady Barber; and our local composer T B Richards lived in The Strand. There were numerous dressmakers and their apprentices, boot and shoe shops and repairers and a China Dealer in King Edward Street.

Has anyone any information on more of these businesses, not just in Blaengarw but anywhere in the Garw?

A CAT'S NINE LIVES, ALL GONE AT ONCE!

Ian Black

My great-great-aunt Polly was a large woman with an equally large and colourful personality, able to tackle most of what life could throw at her and frightened of nothing and no-one: EXCEPT that is, of mice.

Spotting some droppings in the kitchen one day she immediately arranged to get a cat, which arrived soon after, against the wishes of husband Dai. She assumed that all traces of a mouse would soon be gone, but day after day the signs were still there and the mouse, emboldened, would be scuttling about in full view of its audience both human and feline, the humans cowering and the cat totally indifferent.

Dai had had enough, so one evening when his wife was out he took the cat down to the river and drowned it, figuring it wasn't fit for purpose. (It WAS the 1940's, and everything had to earn its keep, even a pet animal, otherwise it had to be disposed of – hard to accept today).

On Polly's return she asked where the cat was- she'd become fond of it and it usually rushed to meet her when she came in. When she heard what Dai had done she was incandescent with rage and upset, and reached for the nearest thing to hand in the kitchen, which happened to be a flat iron, and hit him across the head, knocking him unconscious onto the floor.

On realising what she'd done she ran screaming out of the house down the street, shouting that she'd killed Dai! When she and the neighbours got back to the house Dai was coming round, and the first words he spoke, and the last for many a day, were "You are never getting another cat again!"

I was never told if they did get another!





WOULD YOU LIKE TO TAKE YOUR INTEREST IN THE GARW VALLEY TO ANOTHER LEVEL?

**If the answer is yes, why not come and
help us in the running of the
Garw Valley Heritage Society?**

As some of us are getting older we are always keen to hear from any current and prospective members who may want to help us in maintaining our Society, its public and web presence, and its archive.

There are so many different tasks in the running of this Society. Whether you are interested in meeting people, getting involved in our exhibitions, helping with our ongoing archiving, helping with our IT, or just offering memories, experiences, advice or your time we'd love to hear from you.

We have many exciting upcoming projects planned, so please get in touch and learn and share more about this beautiful valley.

**If you're interested and for further information please see page 2
for a list of the many ways to contact us.**

Thank you!

DATES FOR THE DIARY



SATURDAY SEPTEMBER 16TH

10am-4pm at Tabernacle in Pontycymmer, Cadw Open Doors event.

An exhibition of Garw life over the last 150 years will be featured alongside Richard Price (300 years anniversary of his birth), Daniel James of *Calon Lân* 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.

Please see the poster on the back cover.

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. Keep an eye on our website, Facebook page and the Workmen's Hall website for dates.

OPEN DAY

FREE ENTRY

AT THE TABERNACLE CHAPEL

SATURDAY 16th SEPTEMBER 2023

10am–4pm Meadow Street, Pontycymer CF32 8HF

Light refreshments • Artefacts • Slide show • Display and Exhibition

MUSIC!

Guest organist GRAHAM HOLCOMBE will be giving a talk and playing between 11.30am and 12.30pm

(This is one of the very few pipe organs remaining in the churches and chapels of South Wales)



A CADW OPEN DOORS PROJECT

Presented by the Tabernacle Chapel and Garw Valley Heritage Society

Unfortunately, due to the age and design of the building, some areas are not wheelchair accessible