



WINTER NEWSLETTER 2023



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The Garw Valley Heritage Society wishes all our members, friends and supporters
 a very happy Christmas, and a peaceful and prosperous New Year.

NADOLIG LLAWEN A BLWYDDYN NEWYDD DDA I CHI GYD.

CROESO I GAEAF 2023!

WELCOME TO OUR WINTER 2023 NEWSLETTER.

Welcome to the festive season once more. In this edition we have some seasonal items, some thoughts on decimalisation's effect on a small boy's pocket money, some local archive items, some Garw nicknames, a great story about the Garw Glee Club in 1921, and news on what we have been doing. *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.

FROM THE ARCHIVES: THE GARW GLEE PARTY AND GILBERT HARDING



IN SOME PAPERS donated to the Society recently we have found the following newspaper account from the *Glamorgan Gazette*. As usual, we would welcome any comments or information that could add to the story.

Readers may remember the TV programmes from the late 1950s, such as *What's My Line?*, in which Gilbert Harding (*above, inset*) was a regular panellist. One of the programmes in which he was involved with was *Songs for the Asking*, and one of the songs requested was *Comrades in Arms*. He mentioned that the finest singing he had ever heard was from a male voice choir visiting Pwllheli in 1921, singing that very song. It had so moved Mr Harding that he wept on hearing it.

But which choir was it?

The *Gazette* reporter made contact with Dick Griffiths, the owner of the charabanc *Maid of the Hills*, which had often been used to transport choirs and other groups to venues around the country. Dick remembered the trip to North Wales in 1921 very well. The charabanc took 12 hours to get to Blaenau Ffestiniog with nearly 30 members of the Garw Valley Male Voice Choir, who had been chosen to form a Glee Party. The aim of the tour was to raise funds for the children's soup kitchens, put in place during a miners' strike.

One of their concerts was held in Betws-y-Coed where the population was very much against colliers and the strikes, and at the start of the concert there were only two dozen people inside, with the crowds outside. However before the end of the concert the crowds

were unable to resist the quality of the singing, and asked for a repeat performance the next evening, which unfortunately had to be refused because of the committed schedule.

From then on the Garw Glee Party travelled from town to town, with crowds surrounding the charabanc as soon as it arrived, not allowing it to pass until the choir had sung for them.

One day the stopping place was Pwllheli, and as usual the crowds turned out but before they could start to sing the local police asked them to move on as they were causing an obstruction. To save an awkward situation the owner of a large café nearby offered all the men a free meal if they would come inside and sing for them. This was agreed, and the crowds followed. The choristers came under the baton of Mr J. Butler for *Comrades in Arms*. The piece had only half finished when Dick, who was sitting near the conductor, noticed two young men nearby in the audience, one of them crying. Dick nudged the conductor who stopped the singing and asked the young man if they should sing something else, as that song appeared to upset him. The young man replied that they should continue, which they did, and they received a tremendous ovation.

Dick said, some 36 years later, that he could not be sure that the young man was actually Gilbert Harding, but he did offer at the time to send him a photo of the Glee Party as a souvenir!

Information from the Glamorgan Gazette and memories of local people.

CHILDREN STOP BINGO

We are given many articles, papers, photos and newspaper cuttings, often anonymously, and often we are unable to date them accurately if we are not told; the following item came as a newspaper clipping found in a bundle of papers, undated, with no identification. It is copied here as the original is too faded to reproduce.

“Enquiries so far lead us to believe the protest was driven as a result of rumours that the cinema in Pontycymmer would close for films but be used solely as a bingo hall – is this true? Sadly the building no longer exists for either pastime. Has anyone any more information?”

Children and teenagers in the mining village of Pontycymmer, Glamorgan, have won their battle to stop bingo sessions in the local cinema. At the same time however they lost the only facility for showing films.

More than 300 children and teenagers had demonstrated for 2 hours outside the hall to protest against bingo. While they did so, about 50 people, mostly housewives, queued for bingo and were booed by the demonstrators. The bingo was cancelled.

Mr Ivor Williams, secretary of the hall’s management committee, last night announced that it would be closed altogether this weekend. The youngsters will have no cinema facilities, and the bingo fans are without a hall.”

WELSH CHRISTMAS CUSTOMS

THE CALENNIG

This is a gift for New Year, given as a wish for peace and prosperity for the year to come.

Tradition says It was originally given in the form of an olive branch (from where we get the saying) which the Romans obtained from the sacred groves of the goddess Strenia. When the Romans conquered Britain they brought the custom with them, and those areas occupied by them carried it on, the gift being given between Christmas and New Year.

Olive branches were not available, so an apple was used, with three twigs as legs; the apple was stuffed with split almonds and a small spray of evergreens were stuck into the top around the stalk. Children would carry these around singing their carols and getting a few small cakes or pennies for bringing the lucky calennig. Households would put them in their windows hoping they would last all year, as the luck would last as long as the apple did!

To make your own, pierce small slits in the flesh of an apple and insert split almonds to make it look spiky all over. Then insert the three twigs into the apple's base to enable it to stand. Place a small candle, a red one would be good and festive, into the top of the apple, and tie a piece of baby ribbon around the candle's base. Then insert three small sprigs of evergreen around the candle and ribbon.

There you have a Christmas decoration from 4th century Roman Britain.

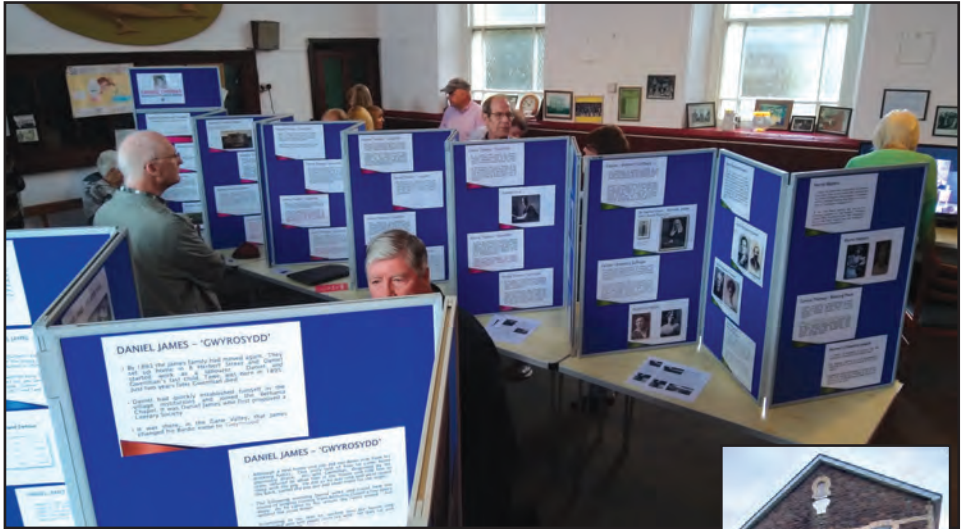
With thanks to Celtic Life International

A WELSH CHRISTMAS PIÑATA

Fill with sugared plums a large paper bag, and tie with string around the top to keep it closed. Then suspend it by the string from the centre of a large door-frame (a folding door, for instance, is ideal), or to the ceiling, if convenient. Each of the children must be provided with a long stick. They are then led one at a time to within reach of the bag, and direct them to try while blind-folded, to strike the bag with the stick, they are allowed three attempts; after which, if they are unsuccessful, they must give up their place to another. The play goes on in this manner until someone strikes the bag so as to tear a hole in the paper; upon which the sugar-plums fall out, and are scattered over the floor, whence all the children can scramble for them.

Monmouthshire Merlin. 24/12/1859

WHAT WE HAVE BEEN DOING



PONTCYMMER TABERNACLE DISPLAY AND RECITAL

Saturday September 16th was the day of Cadw's Open Doors event in Tabernacle Pontycymer, at which we were once more showing the life and times of Richard Price together with the Fannie Thomas and Daniel James material. Of special note that day was the playing of the organ by Graham Holcombe, who was also able to talk briefly on how important the Tabernacle organ was in the history of chapel music in South Wales. This pipe organ was one of only a small number of chapel organs in South Wales still left in use. It needs tuning he said, and should be looked after for posterity, something that unfortunately could be of considerable cost to future custodians. It was good to see several people from outside the valley who had come just to hear that played.



THE PRICE OF CHANGE (Play)

On September 30th, and 6th and 7th October GVHS members attended the performance of the play that playwright Vic Mills presented at Blaengarw Workman's Hall, called 'The Price of Change', which dealt with Richard Price's philosophy and how it is seen in today's times.



PURPLE PLAQUE (Fannie Thomas)

The appeal for a Purple Plaque to honour Fannie Thomas is still with Huw Irranca Davies and this is being followed up on behalf of the Purple Plaque society. Readers may refer to the Summer newsletter for more information on Miss Thomas and 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).

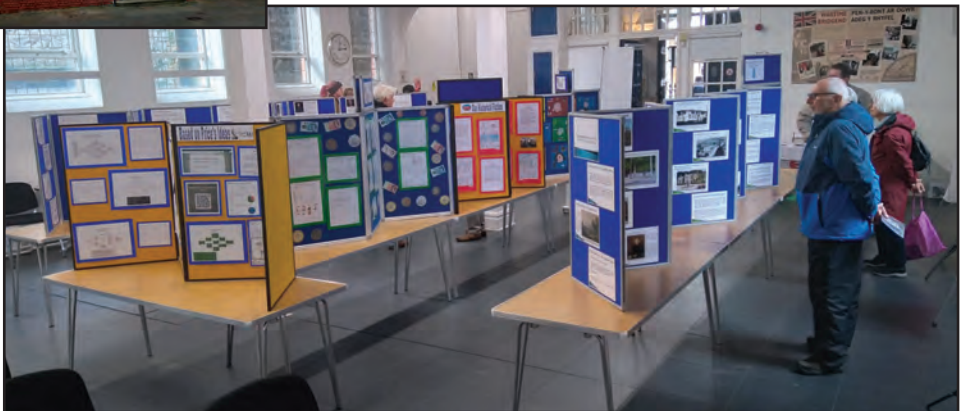
■ **Of current interest are the names found, but no location identified, of COEDANYN, CWMEDYM, GWENIGEN. Can anyone help with more information?**

RICHARD PRICE RETURNS (AGAIN)



On October 18th and 19th we were able to hold another Richard Price exhibition at Carnegie House in Bridgend – surprisingly well-attended considering the town centre is normally quiet on weekdays.

On Saturday November 4th our Richard Price material along with our digital life presentation of his life story was brought out for Glamorgan History's annual AGM and talks at the Heronston Hotel in Bridgend – a collaboration which worked well and hopefully can be repeated for the future.



DECIMALISATION BLUES

Gerald Jarvis

When I was growing up the ways of getting extra money other than Birthdays were varied and seasonal, Christmas carolling being the most promising. The problem was that you had to share out any money with the group, thus minimising your profits. A lone caroller had to have a good voice, and a certain amount of cuteness on his/her side, and sadly I had neither. Then there was the question of repertoire, whether you gave the customer a full carol, then knocked, or started hammering as soon as you got to “Deep and crisp and even”, stopping as soon as the door opened. On New Year’s Eve, (if you were allowed to stay up that late), outside a club, or pub you could benefit from the alcoholic indulgence of strangers. The run up to Bonfire Night was good providing you had put some work into the ‘Guy’ and not just put a mask on your younger brother and told him to sit still in his pram. This money was supposed to be used to buy extra fireworks with; Roman candles and Jackie-jumpers were my favourites but inevitably it went on penny bangers and sweets. It was only with the arrival of decimalisation that I really appreciated how much the old coinage meant – the looks, the feel, the shapes and sizes of the hard-won coins that I used to know and love, and depended on, will forever be part of my childhood.

The Farthing, Half-penny, Penny, the Threepenny bit, Sixpence, and the Shilling, were pretty much within my sticky grasp, but the Two-shilling piece and the Half-Crown were the coins one only dreamed of. Paper money rarely figured in my childhood, so the Ten-shilling note and the One- pound note were like hens’ teeth.

When in 1961 the farthing ceased to be legal tender I took its removal as calmly as possible. A farthing was a tiny coin with a picture of a wren on the ‘tail’ side and was worth a quarter of a penny. That might not sound a lot, but it was enough to purchase four Black Jacks, (a sticky liquorice flavoured sweet), or 2 ozs of Floral gums.

So beloved were the pre-decimal coins they all had their own nicknames. The Half- penny or Ha’penny as it was called, was the occasional lucky find in the gutter when playing marbles or alleys; a nice little coin with the picture of a galleon on the tail side, it was used in the pub game of Shove Ha’penny. I do remember, but did not quite understand, my grandmother calling out “Don’t forget! Keep your hand on your ha’penny!” whenever one of my young aunts went out to a dance. I used to think it was advice for her to keep an eye on her purse.

The Penny was the workhorse of a child’s currency and could be exacted for all sorts of errands, or just general good behaviour. It was a solid copper coin and a ‘shillings-



worth' of pennies could weigh as much as a quarter of a pound. (It took 240 pennies to make up a pound note!)

The Threepenny (pronounced Thrupenny) bit was sometimes referred to as a 'joey', and there used to be little silver threepenny coins as well: these were often saved and put into Christmas puddings to choke unwitting elderly relatives and greedy children. After they ceased to be legal tender these coins were often made into charm bracelets, but the one I remember most was a brassy looking thing with twelve sides and a bunch of flowers (Thrift) on the tail side.

A sixpenny piece, or sixpence, was a 'tanner', a favourite gift of Nana's and Bampy's. I do remember that with this coin you could get you into a Saturday Matinee at the local Cinema and have enough change to keep you supplied with sweets throughout the two short films, a cartoon, and the adventure serial. I am reminded that my mother told me that "she always kept one as a suspender button in her stocking, so that she always had the bus fare home."

A Shilling was know as a 'bob', This was the 'Bob A Job' week staple. This was when Scouts and Cubs were told to scour their local area begging to work? Occasionally this could lead to an attractive, negligee wearing housewife with cascading blonde hair, letting you clean out her budgie's cage before plying you with Corona cherryade and fairy cakes afterwards. More often than not it would entail slaving for several hours hacking away at a bramble patch with a blunt breadknife while some old battleaxe in a nylon 'pinnie' and fluffy slippers stood over you puffing on a Park-Drive, and all for a shilling! Which was dutifully handed over albeit reluctantly to Scout funds to pay for new pennants to put on sticks so that we could hit Brownies over the heads at Church Parade.

A Two shilling piece was next, this was only ever called a 'Two bob bit', or a 'florin' if you were posh, so called because of its flower like pattern on one side? I got one of these for helping a milkman during the week before school.

The next coin was the child's currency king, the mighty silver cartwheel of the Half-Crown was known as 'two and six', or 'half a dollar'. This was the preferred coin gift of jolly uncles with beery, bear-like hugs and whiskery kisses, or better still, tippy aunts with their lipsticky, and sherry perfumed cuddles being the price to earn one. The world was your oyster with one of these in your back pocket.

Paper money did not feature much in my childhood, but on birthdays you might get a Postal Order in a card for five or ten shillings from a distant relative, this was never seen as money, because it usually had to be 'saved' it went into the bank or Post office account "for your future". Thereby cutting out the middle man; YOU. And you had to write to thank whoever sent it even though you never got to actually 'spend' it.

I once found a pound note blowing about the fairground in Barry while on a club outing, Not quite believing my luck, I cashed





this in immediately at a kiosk and set out on a monumental spending spree on the 'slots.' I can still remember having so much 'change' left over, that I buried it in an ornamental flower bed on my way back to the bus. I still await with trepidation the local newspaper headline – *Pre-Decimal Hoard Found By Council Worker On Barry Island Front.*

Combinations of all these coins would weigh down the pockets of my trousers with a genuine threat of exposing myself after an intense bout of Carol singing, or Penny for the Guy, when the accumulated 'tonnage' of what today is called 'shrapnel', fully tested the resolve of my elasticated waist band.

Those readers who have known only decimal currency will have no idea of the load small boys were forced to haul around. It was practically child labour. I may have been born into a generation or so late enough to avoid being press-ganged into the Royal Navy or forced up a chimney, but I still had to tramp around in search of entertainment and sweet shop bargains.



NICKNAMES

A contribution from Tudor G. Davies.

My Dadcu, living in Maes-y-Deri was known as Mr Thomas the Station, because of its proximity, even though he had no connection to the station.

Although these might sound apocryphal, the following are people my mother knew of personally, so these are genuine Welsh nicknames.

- i) The local 'Beat Bobby' in the Garw when my mother was young was a bit of a 'jobs-worth', and if he came across a mischievous young 'un. He would pull out his Police issue notebook, lick the end of his pencil and say something akin to "*I know who you are, and I'm putting your name in my book.*" For this reason, he was known as **Dai Book and Pencil**. Until, that is, he was promoted to Sergeant. At which point, his nickname was instantly upgraded to **Dai Book and Biro**.
- ii) (N.B. This only makes sense with a Welsh accent.) A man from the Garw (I'm not sure if he was a rugby football player or a collier) had lost the lower part of one of his ears in an accident of some kind. He was thence forth always known as **'Eighteen Months'**, because he only had *'A yer and an half'*.

There are more and when I remember I'll let you know.

P.S. When my mother died, I decided to add her maiden name to my surname as a mark of remembrance, because I was not given it as a middle name like all the other males in the family. To all intents and purposes, I'm still just Tudor G. Davies, apart from on official documents. My poor son delights in the name Alexander Tudor Thomas Davies!



Motor station in Blaengarw

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!

