



SPRING NEWSLETTER 2024



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CROESO I GWANWYN 2024!

WELCOME TO OUR SPRING 2024 NEWSLETTER.

This edition makes no apologies for concentrating on Blaengarw, as March 2024 celebrates 130 years of the opening of Blaengarw Workmen's Hall and there will be several events in place to mark this (see later in this newsletter, and the article previously printed on how the Hall came into being). March is also the 40th anniversary of the miners' strike, which did so much to change the face of all the Valleys, not just the Garw, and again there will be events that depict memories from that time. In addition, an eclectic mix of items and photographs from our archives is presented, all collected or donated by Garw people. *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.

THE HISTORY OF BLAENGARW WORKMEN'S HALL



In the early 1880's the Blaengarw Workmen's Hall was just a dream of a few public spirited men with only one ambition: to build a Workmen's Hall and Institute.

The prime mover and secretary of this mammoth project was Evan P Griffiths, Cashier at the International Colliery. Next in line to the colliery manager he would have had a considerable influence within the local community.

He was involved in all public affairs, and was Chairman of the old Llangeinor School Board with responsibility for most of the schools in the Garw Valley.

In 1886 a committee was formed to help in his concept, with Evan P Griffiths as the Secretary and James Davies, who was Blaengarw's first postmaster, as treasurer.

The finance was funded by contributions of one penny in the pound deducted from the wages of employees at the four collieries – Ocean Garw, International, Glengarw (Bala) and the Darren (which closed in 1920).

Building work started in early in 1893 when the sum of £3,400.00 had been collected, and was completed in 1894 and the hall was opened on the 5th March.

Many obstacles were encountered during the project, but with the dedicated work of a tireless committee and Evan Griffiths together with the contributions of our ancestors "The



David Hunt unveils Arts Council British Gas Award at the Valleys LiveFestival launch on Tuesday September 8th 1992.

Hall” is still a major part of our community. The “dream” is still an important meeting place for the Garw Valley and stands today as a monument to human perseverance and community spirit.

The residents, anxious to show their gratitude and generosity to Mr Griffiths, collected the grand total of £65.00. This and a “handsome” gold watch and chain was presented to him in appreciation of the dedicated work he had undertaken. The hall, which could seat approximately 600 people, together with a library and lesser hall, all provided a hitherto unheard advantage in the mining communities of South Wales.

In more recent times the Hall closed after a near-disaster in the mid-1970’s. A heating pipe ruptured during a performance of Peter Pan, spewing carbon monoxide fumes through the cinema. 54 children and 2 adults were taken to Bridgend Hospital after passing out, but luckily there were no fatalities.

The Hall remained unused for some years until it was rescued by Valley and Vale with grants from Bridgend Council and the Welsh Government, and it reopened in 1992.

The mosaic *shown right*, on the street-facing wall of the Hall, was commissioned and is part of a larger display, to remind visitors and local people of the Garw Valley’s most famous resident, Dr. Richard Price of Llangeinor.

Last year 2023 was the 300th anniversary of his birth, and there were many celebrations taking place here in the Garw (see our newsletter last Spring), in London where he lived for a time, and in France and the United States, whose revolutions he influenced with his philosophical writings.



A CHILD'S LETTER ABOUT BLAENGARW IN 1899.

“Dear Uncle Joe,

I am going to write you a description of Blaengarw. First of all it is the shape of a triangle. It is situated at about 8 miles from Bridgend. In the centre of the town is a triangular park, with some lovely trees growing in it. There are four large chapels and one church, and two more denominations without chapels. There are two large steam coal collieries in Blaengarw. They are called the International and the Ocean. The International is managed by Mr James Picton and the Ocean by Mr D Matthews. The International raises about 1,000 tons a day. The population of Blaengarw is about 3,000 people, Blaengarw was started about 15 years ago. There is a large school here as well. The headmaster is Mr Hargest; the headmistress is Miss H. Gelder*. There is a large Workmen's Hall and Institute, all built by the workmen of Blaengarw. The Library consists of 1,400 to 1,500 books of both languages, and a good number of magazines for the young men to read in their spare time. The only drawback to Blaengarw is that there is no railway station here. We have to walk all the way to Pontycymmer which is about a mile away.”

Written by Thomas John Jones (12) published in the South Wales Echo in 1899



* Helen Gelder, along with Fanny Thomas, were the leading suffragists in the Garw Valley, doing much in South Wales to bring about voting rights for women.

** Blaengarw station was officially opened on May 26th 1902.

FURTHER DOWN THE VALLEY: THE HOOPED GRAVE OF LLANGEINOR



The graveyard attached to St Cein's church in upper Llangeinor contains an unusual grave covered over by an iron grille, a sight very rare these days (see below).

It is not known why this particular grave is covered in this way—the inscription on the headstone is not clear enough to identify the occupant, but it would seem it is a relic from the practice of over two centuries ago, when these iron grilles were placed over the graves of the newly buried to stop the theft

of bodies for medical purposes. An alternative explanation could be that the grille was moved about and placed over the newest grave to protect it while it settles, and then moved on to fit over any newer arrival, which seems a more likely theory than body-snatching, considering the rural location of Llangeinor centuries ago, but who knows? Anyone with better ideas, please get in touch.



AS IT'S SIX NATIONS TIME ...

From the archives come two photographs of Blaengarw Rugby Team. The top photograph (from the Coombs Collection) and is undated, while the bottom photo comes from 1974.



BLAENGARW JUNIOR SCHOOL TOP JUNIORS CLASS OF 1961-1962



Back row:

NED EDWARDS (11+ class teacher this year, and Headmaster),
Graham Jones, Brian Thomas, Stuart Evans, Brian Philips, Maldwyn Hart

Middle row:

Eleanor Jenkins, Megan James, Wendy Elliott, Linda Pugh, Barbara Evans,
Phyllis Bridgewater, Ann Jones

Front row:

David Dyer (sitting), Ann Williams, Susan Legg, Ruth Philips, Myrtle Ward,
Margaret Evans, Ruth Stoneham, Vivian Williams (sitting)

A GARW MISCELLANY

A REMINDER OF THE BEAUTIFUL VALLEY IN WHICH WE LIVE



© Richard Berry

FOUND IN THE ARCHIVES:

FIRST AND LAST (A temperance poem, 1891.)

*First puff, Sick enough.
First beer, Feels queer.
First whisky, Feels frisky.
First rum, Very glum.
Brandy splash, Mental crash.
All combined, Shattered mind.
All done, Hearse for one.*

REMEMBER ONE OF THESE?



1949 Bedford OB “straight-liner” 29-seater bus/coach



Gwendoline Terrace, Blaengarw, in the 1940's

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 YOUR DIARY

ALL HELD AT BLAENGARW WORKMEN'S HALL, Blaengarw CF32 8AW



MARCH 5th (Tuesday) - WORKMEN'S HALL OPEN DAY

10am-4pm.

Members of the public are invited to join in with their memories of Blaengarw and the Hall as part of their 130th anniversary celebrations. Refreshments provided.

MARCH 6th (Wednesday) to MARCH 8th (Friday) – THE MINERS STRIKE AT 40

A three-day commemoration and exhibition in the Hall showing the Miners' Strike events of 40 years ago. Photographer Richard Williams is hosting a photographic exhibition of his work from his time at the *Western Mail* during that period (11-4pm).

MARCH 15th (Friday) - RICHARD WILLIAMS TALK

6.30pm (doors open 6pm).

Richard Williams will be giving a talk on the stories behind his Miners' Strike photographs.

MARCH 21st (Thursday) - BEHIND THE PICKET LINES Interactive exhibition.

11am-4pm.

This is an interactive exhibition in the Hall entitled "*Behind The Picket Lines*", and will feature portraits, an audio-visual installation and a Virtual Reality experience.

These events will be organised by Awen at the Workmen's Hall, with extra help offered by the GVHS.



BLAENGARW WORKMEN'S HALL AND KATIE STREET