



WINTER NEWSLETTER 2024



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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 2024!

WELCOME TO OUR WINTER 2024 NEWSLETTER.

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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.



Famous people from the Garw:

BILLY REES (1924–1996)

BILLY REES was born in Pwllcarn Terrace, Blaengarw in March 1924. He was spotted playing local football by Cyril Spiers who was the Cardiff City manager. Billy signed for Cardiff playing 83 war-time games for them, and scoring 74 goals – a record any player would be proud of. Billy also played in the 1945 Wales v England War International.

When the Football League restarted after World War II Billy helped Cardiff City get promotion from Division 3 South to Division 2. Playing inside forward he was their top scorer the following season. In the summer of 1949 Tottenham Hotspur paid £14,000 for him, but

he only played 11 games for them scoring 3 goals as he suffered a series of injuries which had resulted in him struggling to get in the first team.. He was soon sold to Leyton Orient for £14,500 where he spent 6 years scoring 58 goals. Billy also played non-league football with Headington Town and Kettering Town.

Billy Rees was very proud of his four Welsh Caps earned for playing against Northern Ireland, Belgium, Switzerland and Ireland, where John Charles was one of his team mates.

After his football career was over Billy Rees returned to the Bridgend area working for a pharmaceutical company. He ended his life living in Llangeinor back in the valley in which he was born. *Ian Black*



From the archives:

FFALDAU SQUARE OF OLD



This painting of Ffaldau Square, artist unknown, comes courtesy of David Coates and family.

“The Ffaldau Square has a very different appearance and one that compares favourably with that of only a few years ago. Hence its increased popularity as a centre of attraction and a meeting place for so many with time to spare. It is a rendezvous where many problems are discussed. The topics of the day are gripped with the keenest possible interest. There pressing problems are discovered, and unemployment is solved. Eyes scan the mid-day papers for prospective ‘winners,’ which, alas! Too many are eventually ‘also-rans.’ In fine weather, the river side of the Square has the appearance of an esplanade, with the row of seated males debating, approving, confirming, denying as the case may be. One of the chief topics is the day’s work, and “How many did you fill today, Evan?” is a favourite question. Feminine embarrassment is evident as the young ladies go tripping by. The passing vehicles (some rather ancient; others not so new), ply for hire to and from Blaengarw. On Sunday the local Salvation Army Band pleases all with music for the ears of many. The Ffaldau Square, surely, will exist as the centre of attraction for multitudes as long as the Garw valley is inhabited”.

Gazette, August 26th 1930

From the archives:

WELSH CHRISTMAS CUSTOMS

TAFFY

Families would while away the dark hours on Christmas Eve, before Plygain, by boiling up pans of toffee on open fires. Dollops would be dropped into icy cold water and the taffy curled up into all sorts of shapes, like letters, and this was a way of divining the initials of the younger and unmarried future loves.



MARI LLWYD

The Grey Mare, a pre-Christian tradition, is still acted out in parts of Wales today. If a real horse was not available, a horse's skull, (or in recent times a polystyrene or cardboard construction), would be placed onto a broom handle and a sheet covered the neck to the ground (*left*). On visiting friends and neighbours door to door, the jawbone would be clacked against the skull, or broom handle, as you wished everyone a merry Christmas. In older times the verbal exchange was more likely to be a challenge of rhyming insults.

WASSAIL

Not a uniquely Welsh custom (the word Wassail comes from Anglo-Saxon 'Waes Hael', meaning 'be, or grow, healthy'), drinking from the wassail bowl (*below*) was a common custom at Welsh Christmases. The bowls were often elaborate and many -handled, filled with fruit, sugar and spices, and topped up with warm beer.

As it was passed round the drinkers would make a wish for a successful year's farming and a bumper crop at harvest time.



WHAT WE HAVE BEEN DOING



PONTYCYMER TABERNACLE DISPLAY AND RECITAL

Saturday September 21st was the day of Cadw's Open Doors event in Tabernacle Pontycymer. For this year's new exhibition we decided to focus on Garw citizens who have made names for themselves, either here at home or elsewhere. Previously we have featured people such as Richard Price and Fannie Thomas, but there were many others who have gone on to become well-known.

Once again we were lucky to host organist Graham Holcombe, retired canon of St David's in Cardiff. Graham gave a delightful programme

of both classical and modern composers' works, and passed on his knowledge of chapel organs in South Wales. The pipe organ in Tabernacle is one of only a small number of chapel organs in South Wales still left in use.



THE FUN PALACE

On **October 5th** an event titled The Fun Palace was held at Halo

in Pontycymer. The event was organised by local volunteers, and advertised as a Family Fun Day. Visitors could take part in a number of free events such as talks, crafts, group singing, games, hula-hooping, dancing for fitness and creative writing. The GVHS was present, and member Gerald set up a table in the laid out with children's toys which were popular many years ago - the children were





very interested and had a go at everything! These photographs show the aftermath. The event was a great success, and is likely to be repeated next year, bigger and better, as it was a great day for families to get out and enjoy themselves all together.

ARCHIVING AND MAP DIGITISING

all ongoing as long as it doesn't get too cold in the upper rooms of Tabernacle in the Winter!

DIANA McVEAGH

In October we were contacted by Diana McVeagh (Diana Morley as she is now), relative of Morgan Hughes of the well-known drapers and milliners in Oxford Street. She is elderly now and wanted to visit all the places she had heard about as a child, so we were able to show her around the valley. She met local and well-known artist Kevin Sinnott, and Beryl Roberts, mother to Clive Roberts, in whose premises Morgan's wife was born. She was accompanied by Piers Lane, world famous concert pianist, and it was a pleasure to show them around. Diana is a musicologist and an author of several books including the life of Edward Elgar. She donated an old family Bible to add to our considerable collection. The photograph below shows Diana with Beryl Roberts, both well into their nineties and looking wonderful.



From the archives: **A TUDOR TALE**



As we are currently being treated to a lot about Henry VIII and the Tudors on our TV screens, here's what an 1892 schoolboy wrote about them in an essay reprinted in the Western Mail in October of that year.

“**K**ing Henry 8 was the greatest widower that ever lived. He was born at Anno Domino in the year 1066. He had 510 wives, besides children. The 1st was beheaded and afterwards executed. The 2nd was revoked. She never smiled again, but she said “the word ‘Calais’ would be found on her heart after her death.”

The greatest man of the reign was Lord Sir Garret Wolsey. He was so named the ‘Boy Bachelor.’ He was born at the age of fifteen unmarried. He often said that “had he served his wife as diligently as he had served his King she would not have deprived him of his grey hairs.”

In this reign the Bible was translated into Latin by Titus Oates, who was ordered by the King to be chained up in a church for greater security.

It was in this reign that the Duke of Wellington discovered America and invented the curfew bell to prevent fires, most houses being made of timber. Henry 8 was succeeded by his great grandmother, the beautiful Mary Queen of Scots, sometimes called the Lady of the Lake, or the Lay of the Last Minstrel”.

BARBARA BROOKS

Last minute before being printed we heard from Roy Brooks in New Zealand that this wife Barbara had passed away after a short illness. Barbara and Roy lived in Llangeinor until a few years ago, when they emigrated to New Zealand to join their family. Barbara was a founder member of the GVHS, and was always enthusiastic and supportive of everything we were hoping to achieve, even after their departure to the other side of the world. Our sincere condolences go to their family and friends.

PIGEON RACING IN THE GARW



This lovely painting was recently shown to us by David Coates of Llangeinor, who had several other paintings of famous pigeons on his dining room wall.

This one is of Quick Silver in 1949, who had been flown from diverse places in the UK and on the continent and had won several prizes. His owner Billy Rees is perhaps more well-known as a footballer; we've written about Billy previously on page 3 of this issue.

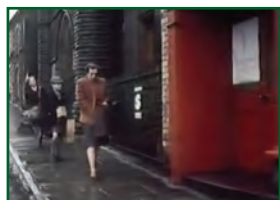
Mr Coates well remembers the pigeon lofts in lower Llangeinor, and those of his relatives who had lofts at the bottom of Lower Adare Street in Pontycymer.

Sadly, pigeon racing seems to have come to an end not long after the mines closed, as is the case in mining communities all over the UK. If anyone knows of the sport still continuing, or has memories of that time they want to share, then please let us know via the contact details on page 2.

THE GARW ON TELEVISION

As many of you are aware, the Garw Valley has been used as a filming location for a number of TV over the years. Here's a list of which we know, but perhaps you know of others and have memories and stories about them being made in the valley. We'll also soon run a list of Film productions in the Garw, such as Very Annie Mary and Framed.

OMRI'S BURNING (ITV television play 1969) Starred Ian Holm.



CARRIE'S WAR (BBC TV series 1974)

This acclaimed original TV adaptation of Nina Bawden's children's book concerned children evacuated into the Welsh valleys during World War II, and was filmed around Blaengarw in 1973.

FALLEN HERO (ITV series 1978)

Following an accident on the pitch, a retired Rugby player tries to reconnect with his wider family his family over two series broadcast in the late 1970s. The second series was filmed in and around Pontycymer and the valley.



READY BREK COMMERCIAL (early 1980s)

This classic commercial with its famous "glowing kids" was filmed in about 1980 around Ffaldau School and Hillview, and is available to watch on YouTube.

LAST DAYS AT FFORCHWEN (BBC documentary 2005)

The life of a hill farmer in the valley.

DOCTOR WHO (BBC 2017)

Areas of the Carn in Blaengarw were used for the episode *The Eaters Of Light*, starring Peter Capaldi with Matt Lucas. Set in Scotland (!) the story involved time travel back to Roman times, and the Garw was used as a backdrop in a few scenes. Filming took place in November 2016. The episode is still available on BBC iPlayer.

THE ACCIDENT (Channel 4 2019)

Starring Sarah Lancashire and Joanna Scanlan, this serial about the effect on a community of an accident at a local factory was partially filmed 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!

