

# Garw Valley Heritage Society Newsletter



## Croeso i Gwanwyn 2023

Spring means daffodils, St David, more daylight, Easter, and plans for Summer holidays. This year it has also meant a celebration of the life of Richard Price, one of Wales' most illustrious exports, not just a citizen of Wales, but of the world. AND he was born in Llangeinor! The Society has been pleased and honoured to have been involved in celebrating the life of this great man. See below and overleaf for more pictures and notes from the day.



The audience at the Richard Price Centre in Llangeinor on February 23<sup>rd</sup>, for the GVHS exhibition and guest speakers which included Huw Edwards, Huw Williams, and Martyn Hooper.

The GVHS exhibition of his life and achievements, plus portraits and flags and the children's drawings and paintings, covered the surrounding walls of the room.





History shows that Dr. Price's ideas and political views played an important role in the development of the modern world; his ideas influenced and supported the American and French Revolutions; he was an adviser on the National Debt of the Pitt governments; his mathematical genius was the foundation of the modern insurance industry and the basis for the development of Artificial Intelligence.

He was also an advocate of women's achievements and workers' rights, and a slavery abolitionist, amongst his many causes.

**LEFT: TynTon Farm, Richard Price's birthplace in Llangeinor, before its recent modernisation.**

**RIGHT:** The BBC's Huw Edwards and Professor Huw Williams debating Price's life and legacy, onstage at the RP centre. The background shows Kevin Sinnott's painting, depicting Price's home, bottom left, with symbols of the revolutionary causes he supported with the onset of the Boston tea party on the right of the painting.



After the discussion Vic Mills' Contemporancient Theatre Company performed extracts from Vic's new play, and Martyn Hooper, chair of the Richard Price Society, gave some lesser-known facts.

Later that day Blaengarw Workmen's Hall held a family day to mark Price's birth, and the King's harpist, Alis Huws, was the guest celebrity who delighted the audience with her playing and stories surrounding the pieces she chose to perform. A magical event!

Answering questions afterwards, she was carefully diplomatic in not telling us what she would be playing at the King's coronation!



**OTHER EVENTS:** The GVHS were proud to be invited to show some of the exhibition at Cardiff's Pier Head, for members of the Senedd, and the local schoolchildren- a very interesting day with speaker Paul Spero from the American Philosophical Society, Vic Mills with an extract from his play, and Professor Huw Williams and other intellectuals forming a round table discussion group afterwards.



**Right Huw Irranca Davies, AM, introducing the day's events at Llangeinor.**



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## AWAY FROM RICHARD PRICE: another look at St David, Patron Saint of Wales

David (Dewi) was the 6<sup>th</sup> century bishop of Saint David's in Dyfed, and was later adopted as Wales' patron saint.

There aren't many contemporary references to him, so our knowledge of him comes mostly from the findings of archaeologists, historical geographers, and students of language and early tradition and folklore. Rhigyfarch son of bishop Sulien, wrote a Latin *Life* in the late 11<sup>th</sup> century, and a Welsh version was written some 200 years later, with several recensions between times. The material for these seems to come from older sources and brings together the myths and legends of his reputation from Irish, Welsh and English sources for the 500 years between his birth and the *Life*.

His mother was Nonn or Non, who from the day of his birth ate nothing but bread and drank only water we are told: David was reputed to have followed her guidance and was known as *Aquaticus*, (the water man), surviving on the local herbs and plants to add variety, becoming well-known as an ascetic and a puritan! He was also well-known for his wisdom and justice, his miracle-working, and his modesty.

His cult spread throughout south and west Wales and south west England and Brittany, even as far as Jerusalem, although there is no proof that he actually went there- later Popes were to declare that 3 pilgrimages to St David's were equivalent to one to Rome, so important was David's standing in the church's hierarchy.

March 1<sup>st</sup> was the day he allegedly was taken up into heaven, where angels brought him to the place where there is 'light without end, rest without labour, and joy without sadness-----'.

***The illustration of St David above is of the stained glass window in Castell Coch, designed by William Burges***

YES CYMRU were also holding a St.David's Day celebration, albeit on March 4<sup>th</sup>, at Pencoed College, and the GVHS were able to take most of the R.Price exhibition material for visitors there. Vic Mills again was able to bring some of his acting group from Contemporancient Theatre company , and old Welsh folk tunes were performed by violinist and accordionist as a background to the speakers.

*We are keen to borrow historical material so 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 – 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 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 which was deducted from the wages of employees at 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 completed in 1894 when the hall was opened on the 5<sup>th</sup> 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 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. And a "handsome" gold watch and chain was presented to him in appreciation of the dedicated work he had undertaken. Providing a place for intellectual improvement with its hall which could seat approx 600 people, a library and lesser hall all of which provided an unheard advantage in the mining communities of South Wales.



***Sent in by Marie Griffiths***



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## The Edward Dunstun Shakespearian Company.

In the 1920's the Secretary of Blaengarw Workmen's Hall was Jack Jones who was also the local Miners' Agent.

The Dunstun performers were considered the best in their field so Jack Jones wrote to their leader and asked if they would come to Blaengarw and perform at the Hall.

Edward Dunstun did not reply to this, seemingly considering his acting troupe too good for the likes of miners & their families; his target audiences were usually London & the Provinces.



Undaunted Jack Jones bombarded Dunstun with more letters, and eventually in an effort to discourage further mail Dunstun quoted Jones the impossible fee of £800 for just one week of performances. At this time a Colliery worker earned about £2.00 per week. Dunstun's asking price represented the total weekly wages of about 200 men.

To everyone's surprise, Jack Jones wrote back accepting the figure. Dunstun had no option but to come to Blaengarw.

The whole company came by train with costumes & scenery etc. Whilst they were here they gave three performances a day, the plays being especially geared to fit the colliery shift system: 10:30 am for those on Afternoon shift, 2:30 pm for those on Night shift, and 7.00 pm performances for the Day shift.

The shows started with *The Taming of the Shrew*, and continued on through the week with *Julius Caesar*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *Macbeth*, and finally *Hamlet*.

This venture actually made a profit because the hall was packed out all week, and there were even some of the audience sitting up on the stage, much as they would have been in Shakespeare's day.

News of this success spread to other coalfields and workmen's halls, who began looking for touring companies to entertain their members. Edward Dunstun added South Wales to his company's itinerary.

Dunstun's Shakespearians included many well-known players of the day, one Norman Woolland went on to play alongside Sir Laurence Olivier in the film version of *Hamlet*. A husband-and-wife team of William Kendal & Laura Liddell, who played at Blaengarw, went on to have a daughter, Felicity Kendall.





## FROM THE ARCHIVES:

**Two short biographies of rugby players of old: as it's Six Nations time!**

### Ivor Thomas.

Ivor Thomas was born in Pontyrhyl in April 1900. He had an unusual rugby career. In 1921 he was a policeman stationed in Penarth and he was playing rugby for Cardiff RFC. In the 1921-22 season he played 37 times for Cardiff. After this season he changed his job and rugby club. He became a coal

miner in the Bridgend area and joined Bryncethin RFC. He played regularly as hooker for Bryncethin and in 1924 he was selected to play hooker for Wales against England at St. Helens Swansea. England won the match 24-9 in front of 35,000 spectators. Ivor was one of the last players to be selected for Wales from a club not recognised as a first class team.

Unfortunately, Ivor was never selected for Wales again but he joined Bridgend RFC and played for them until he lost his job as a miner in the depression. He went to Torquay to find work where he lived for over sixty seven years. Ivor was 95 years old when he died.

**The Grand Slam clock, shown above, made to celebrate Wales' Six Nations win in 2005 after beating Ireland at Cardiff in the last game of the tournament.**

### Glyn John.

Glyn John was born in Neath in 1932 but attended Garw Grammar School when his parents move to the school's catchment area. He played centre for the Welsh Secondary Schools Team in a 30-3 win against England in Cardiff. Glyn also played football for Garw Athletic where he won a Football Association of Wales Youth Cap. At senior level Glyn Johns played for Swansea, Aberavon, Cardiff, London Welsh, Cross Keys, Tondy and the RAF. He also was capped twice for the Welsh Rugby Team. Glyn made his debut at centre against England in a 6-9 defeat at Twickenham in 1954. His second cap came in the same year as fly-half against France in a 19-13 win at Cardiff.

He trained as a teacher at St. Luke's College, Exeter which he also played rugby for. When he was in Exeter he was also selected for the Devon County Rugby team.

Glyn John signed for Leigh Rugby League Club in 1949 for £400 but only played two matches for the club before he decided he wanted to go back and play rugby union. Surprisingly, when he applied to the Welsh Rugby Union his request was allowed provided he returned his signing on fee to Leigh RLFC which he did. He is the only player to be allowed back into rugby union after playing rugby league as a professional since World War 11. The reason given for allowing him back into union was that he was a 17 year old school boy when he had signed professionally. The WRU's decision was a very controversial one with many rugby union countries, clubs and individuals very much against the decision made. The Scottish Rugby Union led many complaints about Glyn John being allowed to play rugby union. The WRU eventually gave in to the complaints and agreed not to select Glyn John for the national side in future. Glyn was allowed to carry on playing club rugby which he did for a number of years. Sadly, he died in 1951 aged 51.



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## WHAT WE HAVE BEEN DOING

### See above!

We have been very busy with preparations for the Richard Price events, liaising with all the various people and organisations involved, and it is to be hoped that we will be able to join in the other activities arranged through the year that commemorate Richard Price. Work is well underway to update our presentation style for display boards and information, which will be rolled out as and when required. Future plans will involve visits to schools and more static displays in the libraries of Betws, Pontycymer and Maesteg once arrangements have been agreed.



In September Vic Mills and his Contemporancient Theatre Company will be staging a theatrical event in Blaengarw that will again highlight Richard Price's achievements, and we understand that he will be looking for supporting actors from the public to appear—watch out for further information. On top of everything else this year of course will be the coronation of

King Charles, due to take place in early May—conversations amongst ourselves have led to suggestions for future articles—how many remember the last coronation, that of Elizabeth II in June 1953? Did you have street parties, special days at school, or did you manage to see it on television, either at home or at a neighbour's? Television sets were quite rare in my upbringing, and I remember that I and about 6 other children were invited in to a crusty old neighbour's front room, IF WE WERE GOOD, where we saw the occasion in flickering black and white on a tiny box in the corner!

If you have reminiscences of that time, do let us know.



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As a reminder of our wonderful wildlife in the Garw, photographer Colin Simper has captured a Red Kite in full flight, and the crocuses below as a reminder of Easter to come.

## A Happy Easter To All

A poster for the Garw Valley Heritage Society. The text is enclosed in a white decorative border. The background of the poster shows a landscape with a wind turbine. The text reads: "Garw Valley Heritage Society", "JOIN US!", "NEW MEMBERS ARE VERY WELCOME", "MEETINGS: FIRST THURSDAY OF EACH MONTH AT 19:00", and "WHERE: TABERNACLE CHAPEL VESTRY, MEADOW STREET, PONTYCYMER".

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