

Garw Valley Heritage Society Newsletter



Croeso i Gwanwyn/Haf 2025

Welcome to Summer 2025.



It is 40 years ago in 1985 that the Ocean colliery closed, the last in the Garw to do so, This plaque was raised to mark the event and is currently being looked after by local residents.



Another reminder of our mining past, this one is in Parc Calon Lan in Blaengarw, a mining family shown with the words to Calon Lan carved out around its base.

As it was the 80th anniversary of D Day in May, some recollections of WW2 at Stormy Down

BULLETS IN THE SAND

David Dimmick

Some recollections of Stormy Down Airfield from the 1940s to the 1970s

In a previous article about Stormy Down I described the finding of some spent bullets from within the piles of sand behind the target area of a WW2 rifle range that we were renovating during the 1970s for use by the Territorial Army, but bullets were not the only items found.

One day when I was clearing undergrowth from around some concrete plinths that were studded with iron rings, I came across what appeared to be a live bullet, which I immediately packed around with bricks, just in case it could go off. Whilst doing this our firm's lorry driver appeared on the scene and asked what we were doing. I explained what we had found and told him I was about to inform the police, which was the expected action in such an event.

"There's no need to do that!" he replied, adding that he would deal with it in a jiffy. Then, after getting a pair of pliers from his lorry he proceeded to remove the pointed end of the bullet, whilst my workmate and I hid behind the shed! He then emptied the contents of the brass case onto a brick and struck a match, causing the spaghetti-like contents to flare into a mini fireball and then disappear. He explained he had learned how to do this whilst doing National Service, and that the bullet was a 303 Round.

The aforementioned concrete plinths were apparently where the Wellington Bombers and other aircraft were attached in order to stabilise them whilst the machine guns at the rear of the aircraft were test-fired: lives would have depended on this.

During the 1970s Stormy Down was a huge rabbit warren, where rabbit runs even extended into the outbuildings where we ate our lunchtime sandwiches. They were discovered when a chap went to get a sandwich from his lunch box only to find that a ferret had beaten him to it, and who it seemed was partial to a bit of Spam! The ferret turned out to be a friendly fellow and we fed him and made a fuss of him, although I don't recall if anyone had thought to engage in the popular sport of 'trousering the ferret' - a lucky escape for the ferret I would have thought! Eventually the ferret was returned to his or her owner, who had been doing a bit of rabbiting that day.

As well as working at Stormy Down I later worked as a bricklayer during the construction of the first phase of the Princess of Wales Hospital at Bridgend, and whilst there Bill, who featured in my previous Stormy Down article, recalled that when he served there as an RAF corporal he was required to escort a fellow airman to the office of their Commanding Officer Taffy Jones, for a dressing-down for some misdemeanour. Unfortunately both the protagonists suffered from a pronounced stammer, with Bill as the escort having to stand there as they spoke. He knew that if he started laughing as he was desperate to do, then he would be on a charge too! One can imagine Bill's relief when the interview came to an end!

My late uncle Fred Oldam of Worcester also served at Stormy Down and went on to serve in North Africa as an anti-aircraft gunner.

Stormy Down was a vital component in the defence of Britain during WW2 and is to this day of great historical and archaeological interest which I believe needs further research and assessment in order to preserve its legacy, and to remember some of its colourful characters.



A Blaengarw resident's acknowledgement of VE Day.

WHAT WE HAVE BEEN DOING-----

It was the **50th anniversary** of the founding of the **Glamorgan Family History Society (GFHS)** in 2024, and on April 5th in Aberkenfig, the Len Evans Centre, to mark the occasion, the GFHS held an Open Day and afternoon tea party for members and non-members to visit, have a chat, cup of tea and slice of cake. Their branches were represented from Newport, Cardiff, Swansea, Maesteg, Barry, Rhondda, Aberdare and Merthyr Tydfil, and we were pleased to be asked to bring along our projector and extensive library of photographs, as well as information about the Garw Valley. Ian and Gerald are shown below, talking to the visitors, and they have been invited to give a talk on Garw life later in the summer on one of the GFHS's monthly meetings.

For more details on that as well as their other events, please see their website www.glamfhs.org.uk

Bridgend Heritage Hub The GVHS is a member of this group of heritage and historical societies and attends meetings/conferences every few months, so Roger and Gerald went to the March event in Porthcawl, with the main topic being the anniversary of the tramways in Maesteg, which was holding several celebrations this year involving dressing up, bus trips etc.

**PEOPLE'S COLLECTION OF WALES**

One of the GVHS involvements of the last year or so has been with the People's Collection of Wales, (PCW) with whom we are pleased to be working in partnership. They have welcomed our participation and help in building their extensive collections of photographs, stories and articles on the history of Wales.

The PCW was established and funded in 2010 by the Welsh Government, and is partnered with the National Library of Wales (NLW), the National Museum of Wales (NMW), and the Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments.

Its aim is to bring together as much as possible of the story of Wales, from articles, memories, stories, photographs and other records, and these can come from individuals as well as organised groups and heritage societies.

All our material and donations will eventually be accessible on their website as well as on our own website, and if you wish to see more of what the PCW does, please look up their collection on the PCW website.

If you have any individual queries then their telephone number is 01970 632811.

Needless to say there is a lot of work involved in cataloguing and categorising our material, and Colin has been very busy organising spreadsheets and labels. We are fully supporting the PCW's aims as we already are aware of much history of the Garw Valley that is being lost, and anything that can be done to keep our heritage alive for future generations must be worth some effort!!

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.

DATES FOR THE DIARY-----

The **12th July** has a celebration in the Railway Shed in Pontycymer as the Railways of Britain are 200 years old and there will be events held all over the country to mark this. They are holding stalls and model railways, and the GVHS will be supplying some of their railway photographs and ephemera in support. www.railway200.co.uk

September 13th will hold our annual Open Doors event in Tabernacle under the auspices of CADW, who encourage these events every year at this time to keep people in touch with their history.

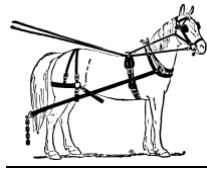
October The Fun Palace event of last year which was very successful is to be repeated this year on Saturday October 4th at the Community Centre in Pontycymer. More details of this will emerge in due course and the GVHS will be bringing along whatever is required from our heritage stores.

DECEMBER- a bit early for advertising, but Santa will be visiting the Garw on Dec. 6th and the 13th- more details in due course from the Garw Railway Society.

For more information on the Garw Valley Heritage Society, please see our website, details left, and you can follow us on Facebook and Twitter. For enquiries and correspondence, please contact Secretary Jean Fowlds, jeanfowlds3@gmail.com tel. 01656 856091

UNRULY LANGUAGE IN A PUBLIC PLACE—

from a 1914 edition of the Gazette----



A woman was out shopping in the town recently when she came across a Co-Operative Society van driver beating his horse. She called upon the man to desist at once, whereupon the van driver turned on her and demanded to know "What b----y business is it of yours?"

The woman pointed out that as a member of the Co-Operative Society she had every right to prevent him from damaging her property; as a shareholder the horse was in part hers. At this point the driver walked to the rear of the horse and plucked a hair from its tail, handed it to the woman and said,

"Well now, there's your share, lady, now f--- off and mind your own business!"

A constable was called, and the driver was fined 5 shillings for bad language.

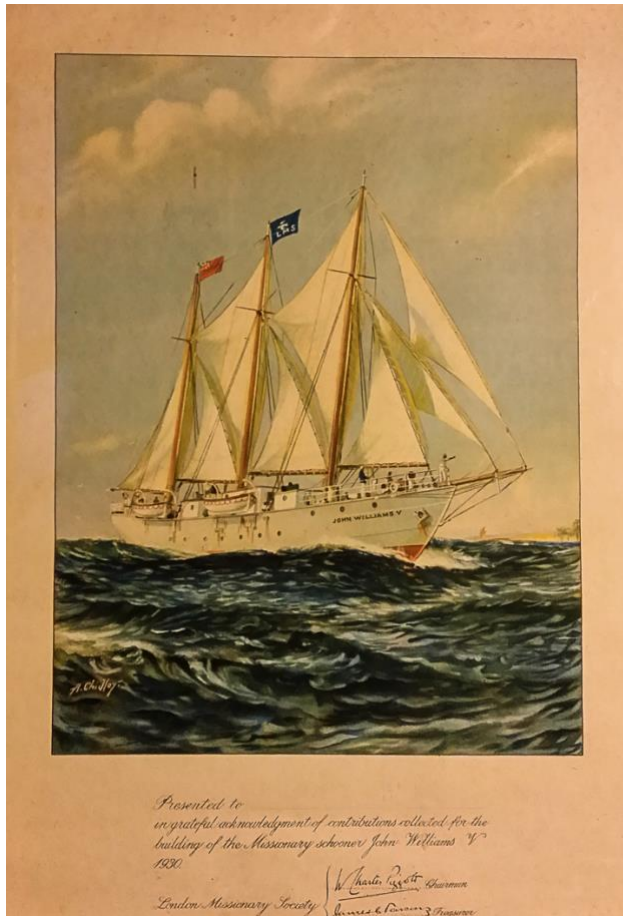
Extract from the memoirs sent to us by Dennis Merry, now living in Chester-le-Street, County Durham

Things I remember are the shops in Blaengarw. On one corner was Blaengarw Workmens Club and on the adjacent corner was EVANS the shop. The Blaengarw Co-Op was still there then and next to the Welsh Chapel was the Newsagents. When I returned to the Garw after completing my National Service, Dyers the Barber's son was running it. The Barbershop was up toward the Ocean Colliery on a corner and opposite another chapel (Bethania). Next door down from this chapel was a boarded up shop. When the BBC made *Carries Wa'* this was used as her 'home' when she was evacuated to Wales. There was also Dan OWEN'S General Stores further down the road from the newsagents. Next to him was the Fish Shop. I can still remember going in there for my grandmother for some Hake cutlets. I mentioned earlier, the Ocean Colliery canteen was just under the bridge- I can also remember going there at about 9- 9:30 at night as a child with my mother and aunt Annie and getting fresh dripping and home-made bread pudding for supper. I was very partial to both, but I wasn't allowed to have much as my mother told me that I would not sleep at night if I had too much.

More of Mr. Merry's recollections will be printed in future editions- editor.

From the Memory Chest-----

*Mrs Lena Charles amongst many older residents remembers her Summer days of
wimberrying on the mountain. The berries were collected in milk bottles and sold for
2/- a pint- 2/6d if she was lucky!*



TREASURES IN TABERNACLE

This is a picture on the wall of the office in Tabernacle, Pontycymer, showing the ship named John Williams V. This and another six belonged to the London Missionary Society (LMS), all named after the missionary John Williams. The first set out to the South Seas in 1844, and the last, the John Williams VII, was decommissioned in 1968. John Williams himself was killed and eaten by cannibals in the island of Erromango in the New Hebrides in 1839 along with his fellow missionary John Harris.

The ships were paid for by contributions made by children when every Sunday collections would be taken at Sunday School (to bring the gospel to the 'heathens'). Many of us older people may remember these collections?

This odd item comes from the archives, and it's hard to remember there was a war on at the time!

From the Glamorgan Gazette of Friday January 12th 1917

STRANGE MOTOR ACCIDENT AT PONTYCYMMER.
BRIDGEND TRADESMAN'S CAR BLOWN DOWN HILL.

PANTYGOG LADY AND TWO SONS INJURED.

On Monday afternoon last a motor-car owned by Mr. Robert Turner, fruiterer, Wyndham Street, Bridgend, was standing in Alexandra Road, Pontycymer, the hand brake fastened and the car scorched* while Mr. Turner was attending a customer. There was a terrific blizzard raging at the time and ultimately the car was blown down the hill.

Whilst going at a rapid speed it dashed into a lamp-post, which was smashed and fell across the pavement. Unfortunately a lady and her two little sons, Mrs. E M Jones and Masters Thomas John (8) and Horace Oswald (6) were passing, and were knocked down and badly bruised and crushed.

They were immediately attended to and conveyed to their home at Windsor Terrace, Pantygog, Pontycymmer. Up to the time of writing we are unable to state the extent of the injuries sustained by either. The motor-car had to be left at Pontycymmer owing to being damaged.

* I have been unable to find the meaning of the word *scorched* as used to describe the car in the above.

Does anyone know-----? I recently came across a book just published by the Bristol Radical History Group, written by Ian Wright, about **John (Jack) Williams**, who began working in the International pit in the Garw at age 13 in 1901 alongside his father. He lived in Mount Pleasant Blaengarw with his parents, his brother, an uncle and some boarders, 10 people in all, 5 of them miners. He appreciated early on how much work his mother had to do to keep the household clean and fed, with constant washing and cooking. Later as a young man he spoke out against the domestic drudgery experienced by women like his mother and campaigned for equal rights for women, supporting the aims of Frances Thomas ('Fanny Bloomers' as she was affectionally known) in her support for Women's suffrage. Jack was severely burned in an explosion not long after he started work, and he was lucky to have survived, needing to spend 6 weeks in a bath of linseed oil.

One of his very early recollections was the riot in 1893 at the International, when the hauliers went on strike after a demand for a payrise as a result of decreasing wages was rejected by the colliery owners. Twenty policemen and a company of the Bedford Regiment were sent to the colliery to protect the blacklegs, and he remembers how his father was involved, pushing away at them. There was no coalfield-wide union in South Wales at the time, and miners were represented by small local associations. In 1880 the Garw Miners' Association (GMA) was formed, made up of lodges around individual pits which sent delegates to GMA meetings. The Liberal party dominated Welsh politics at the time and it soon became apparent that the Liberal policies of moderation and conciliation were not enough to ensure the miners' grievances were settled- a stronger trade union organisation was needed. In 1898 a 6-month- long strike, ending in defeat, made the various local associations come together to form the South Wales Miners Federation. There was a fervent search for the means of independent direct working class political representation in Parliament independent of the Liberal party, and as a result the Independent Labour Party was able to gain a foothold in the South Wales valleys and Jack Williams found his calling.

Editor's note: *The above information is taken from Ian Wright's book, details below.*

To learn more about Jack Williams' part in the mining politics of the time, please read Ian Wright's book "We Will Eat Grass" by Ian Wright, published by Bristol Radical History Group 2025. Paperback £12.00 ISBN 978-1-911522-82-9.

www.brh.org.uk email: brh@brh.org.uk

Sad news:

We were very sorry to hear about the death of one of the Garw's oldest residents, Mrs Beryl Roberts, at the age of 99. Beryl was well-known to everybody who walked up and down Oxford Street in Pontycymer, as without fail every morning until fairly recently she could be seen sweeping the pavement outside the shops of her sons Mark and Clive. It was 10 years to the day that Clive Roberts died, a sad coincidence.

Beryl was a poet, always thinking of her next poem, and we take pleasure in printing her poem 'Beryl's Brush' written in 2015. The photograph shows Beryl in a pub in Cardigan where she delighted the residents there with her recitations and reminiscences.

Beryl's Brush



No batteries in its spotted handle

No computer in its red and blue head

*No mouth to feed, just a weekly wash,
And that is all it needs.*

*We glide along as we hum our song
And it always is a
pleasure*

*To say hello to the folk we know-
The Garw streets are not paved in gold:
Their cobbles green with lichen
Carry the scars of the miners' feet;
That's why we are there to brighten.*

*I'm proud to be a Valley Girl,
That's why I wield my
brush.*

*I want to see the Valley clothed
With that special touch.*

*I want to see it filled
In beautiful shades of green,
Filled with flowers, love and folk,
A sight for all to be seen.*



And that is why I wield my special brush.
Beryl Roberts, Pontycymet, 2015