



Croeso i HYDREF

Welcome to Autumn 2025.

A scene from a Garw carnival some years ago: always great fun for old and young.

See Gerald Jarvis' account of his carnival role (first part, previously printed, but worth another read).

Carnival Memories

I remember one afternoon in about 1967. Jeff Rees and I were having a pint in the Half-Way, when Ivy, the Club steward's wife came in and asked us to give her a hand bringing in some large boxes. After bringing them into the club we helped to unpack them, to find a complete set of 'jazz band' uniforms: there were bright blue military jackets with scarlet piping, and thick blue serge trousers with a broad red stripe down the outside, and blue peaked caps.

A few days later we were 'cornered' by Roy Roberts the Club Sec, and asked if we would join the jazz band. We as young adults had some reservations about it at first, but with the promise of a few free pints thrown in how could we refuse.

Training took place in the evenings on a flat bit of the tip behind the club. Other recruits were the W.a.G's of club members with some sons and daughters thrown in for good measure. Our Drill Instructor was ex-Army (circa 1939-45), along with a couple of hefty chaperones to protect the innocence of the girls from the evil boys.

I found out later that Jeff and I had not been chosen for our soldierly bearing or marching skills, they just happened to have had two uniforms that nearly fitted us! On taking the uniforms home they were also found to be full of moth holes and required a fair bit of repair before we could be seen in public. This work was carried out by Jeff's mum Phyllis, who resisted our pleading requests to "At least taper the trousers". After a few weeks' static training, we graduated onto the main road to Pontycymmer Square and back!

On Carnival day proper, we had to be at the club very early in the morning, this was not a problem, because all the pubs and clubs opened early and more importantly were serving drinks! Every organisation in the Garw was busying itself with final preparations in decorating floats and costumes with the artificial flowers that had been made throughout the year by volunteers, and a last minute frenzy of painting and glueing was taking place everywhere.

The backs of coal lorries and farm trailers would have been already scrubbed clean and floored with carpet remnants, or conveyor belting if you could get it, all to protect bums and hands from splinters and dirt. The float 'theme' would have been decided a year earlier in meetings of Carnival Committees all over the valley. The later round of



Creation carnivals had one central idea, but back in my day the pride was in the individual idea of each organisation. Themes went from the topical to the literary: a popular one for children was nursery rhymes such as Old Macdonald's Farm, for which the children

dressed as animals usually sat on hay bales provided by a local farm. Cartoon characters such as Camberwick Green and Snow White with her 7 dwarves were others. T.V. shows like The Beverly Hillbillies or Dr Who were represented as well.

But it was the 'adult' Club floats that really pushed the boat out: the easiest seemed to be a scene from a Cowboy Saloon, complete with saloon good time girls in revealing dresses, fishnet stockings and garters, with a few grizzled club members drinking whisky



and pretending to play cards. Every so often a gun fight or a typical bar-room brawl would break out on the lorry; some of these were supposed to be for show, but I can remember one or two which were not! I was very impressed one year in the 70's with an amazing float depicting Moby Dick, with a real Captain Ahab pinned by harpoons to a life-size papier-mache Whale being driven through the streets.

Another float was called A Night in the Sultans Harem. This was depicted by ladies of indiscriminate size and age, dressed in bikinis and wrapped around with what looked like coloured net curtains, and dancing suggestively. The Sultan was a rather portly be-turbanned gent painted with gravy browning, who was lounging on piles of cushions smoking a hubbly-bubbly pipe, all in a cardboard simulation of downtown Baghdad. The whole effect was further enhanced by two prop forwards borrowed from the local rugby team, blacked up for the occasion, also with turbans, pantaloons and carrying huge 'swords' as harem guards.

Alongside the floats walked the parents responsible for the children on board; they were there principally to watch that no-one fell off the float, but their full time job was to take a child off for a toilet stop during the parade. In some cases they would be in costume as well. In between each float there would be the various other club jazz bands, they all had exotic sounding names and outfits. The only one I can remember at present were the Rajahs from Blaengarw. Some of the smaller organisations like Scouts and Cubs, Guides and Brownies, and Cadets were in full uniform, with the Churches and chapels being represented too.



FURTHER ACCOUNTS BY GERALD WILL APPEAR IN FUTURE EDITIONS.



QUERN-STONES

A quern stone is a stone tool for hand-grinding various materials, but most especially grains for making flour for bread-making. They have been in use for thousands of years by all nationalities over the world. They are used in pairs: the lower stationary stone is called a saddle quern, while the upper mobile stone is called a muller, rubber, or handstone. The upper stone was moved in a back-and-forth motion across the saddle quern to grind the grains.

The centre hole in the upper stone is called the eye, and a handle slot near the edge would contain a spindle of wood or animal horn with which to turn it. The grain would fall through the eye onto the saddle.

The muller or handstone shown above was discovered by Alwyn Furley of Lliest when he was fishing in the Garw river many years ago. He guessed what it was, as there has been a mill in Llangeinor for centuries, and he wondered whether there was any connection. He carried on searching the river but was unable to find its saddle companion, and he has kept the handstone in his shed ever since.

During the Middle Ages these millstones could be stolen from their owners because the local mill owner would see anyone owning one as being a competitor and likely to steal business from him, so it would be interesting to know how old this one is. Alwyn is making enquiries to see what can be learned.

NB- anyone reading this who has any more knowledge or information on these quern stones, please contact the editor.

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.

WHAT WE HAVE BEEN DOING-----

The **12th July** held a celebration in the Railway Shed in Pontycymer as the Railways of Britain are 200 years old and there were many events all over the country marking this. The GVHS took along many of the Railway-related photos we have, and provided a projector showing Garw heritage scenes to the visitors.

On **August 15th** Gerald gave a talk on his Carnival memories to the Bryntirion community at their Centre in Cefn Glaswell-received (see his article above). **September 13th** was the 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. The GVHS decided to stick with the carnival theme and the display was made up of some great photographs, many by founder member and photographer the late Keith Brocklebank as well as current photographer Colin Simper.



As in previous years Canon Graham Holcombe came and played the Tabernacle organ with a varied programme and gave interesting comments and slices of information about each piece. It was a pity the event was not better attended- maybe it was the bad weather putting people off venturing out, or maybe they did not get to know about it as the Council have been banning the placing of banners in the valley (unless an exorbitant fee is paid).

It was good to meet up with Blaengarw resident Matthew Cook, who has taken on the role of Events and Operations Manager with Awen at Blaengarw Workmen's hall, and we look forward to sharing ideas and working with him if required for future projects.

September 15th Treasurer Ian Black gave a talk to the Glamorgan Family History members on a subject that involved his own family- the notorious case of the Victorian poisoner Herbert Armstrong. Ian's great-aunt was a nurse in the Armstrong household and had to appear in the court case that ultimately ended in his execution. There is controversy to this day about Armstrong's guilt. The talk was well-received, and it gave an insight into the very strange circumstances of the choice of Judge and jurors of the time.

Bridgend Heritage Hub The GVHS is a member of this group of heritage and historical societies, and it is good to know that more groups are joining, as all ideas can be exchanged and projects made more widely known.

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



PEOPLE'S COLLECTION OF WALES

The liaison is ongoing with more of our material being made available.

Full disclosure of how to access this material will be made available soon.

Queries and requests

We often get requests for information about people and places, and whilst we can and do provide photographs or copies of documents, we are not usually able to help with people's family trees. There are several sites on the internet that can help with these, such as Ancestry and Find My Past, or even Free BMD (Births Marriages and Deaths), but if you need a helping hand with family research then you can approach the Glamorgan Family History Society which is based in Aberkenfig. They have open days on alternate Tuesdays when anyone can call in and ask for help. If extensive work is required then they may make a small charge. The contact email address for the Aberkenfig Resource Centre (ARC) is arc2@glamfhs.org.uk.

DATES FOR THE DIARY-----

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 the table of children's toys from olden days that proved popular last year (anything to keep children off their phones and tablets!!).

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.

A piece of our mining history:

MINES RESCUE- MEN DIE IN FOUL AIR DISASTER.

Over hundred years ago a tragic set of events unfolded at the Duchy Colliery, Blaengarw.

It started on **March 2nd 1917**, with what was to be a quarterly training exercise for the men of the Duchy Colliery Mines Rescue Team. At the colliery a request had been made to the colliery manager, Mr.Pugh, to make available some of the old workings at about 500 feet from the mouth of the drift; these workings had been last used in the early 1880's.

There were 6 men in the Duchy Rescue team: (Captain) James Morgan; John Evans; Bert Churchill; David John Williams; Thomas Williams; and William James Beer. Instructor Edward Thorne, from the Brynmenyn Mines Rescue Station, was in attendance to supervise the operation.

At about 3.30pm they entered the disused workings and commenced the work. At 5pm the alarm was raised, as word came that some members of the team were in trouble. It was thought at first that John Evans had got into a pocket of 'foul air' and had been overcome. Instructor Thorne had gone immediately to Evans' aid and in doing so had got into difficulties himself. Despite several desperate attempts by the others to rescue them, both men were now dead.

The manager of the Glenavon/Garw Colliery was nearby and was informed, and it was he who drove down to Brynmenyn Mines Rescue Station to fetch more gas helmets. Equipped with these, further efforts were made to reach the two men. Two members of the Ffaldau Rescue Team, Robert Roberts and Herbert Jones, were on hand by now, and with the help of Mr. Dryborough had already succeeded in bringing out the body of Edward Thorne into the colliery roadway, whereupon Dr. Pennant pronounced him dead.

Other rescue teams arrived on the scene from Maesteg and Brynmenyn to assist, and rescue operations carried on throughout the night to retrieve the body of John Evans. Extra police from Bridgend and Maesteg were drafted in to keep back crowds of people who were gathering around the mine entrance.

At the inquest on the **2nd of April** sensational evidence was given by Dr. John Scott Haldane of Oxford, who had been hired by the Home Office to investigate this case. His evidence showed that the standard 'Draeger' breathing apparatus was used by both of the deceased men.

He had tested this apparatus on himself, and found that if he stood still or walked very slowly he was perfectly safe, but when he walked at a rate of over 3 m.p.h. He quickly became breathless. This apparatus did not supply sufficient pure air when the wearer exerted himself, and therefore was highly dangerous.

He had also paid a visit to the workings at the Duchy, and, in his opinion both men had not been killed by the 'foul air' of the mine, but by the breathing in the Carbon Dioxide contents of their apparatus re-breathing bags.

Summation: Both men had died of asphyxiation due to faulty breathing equipment, but there must now be an official enquiry into the Draeger equipment, which was the standard equipment throughout the mining industry.

Coroners verdict: Accidental Death.

John Evans was a haulier, a married man with 4 children, two of whom were already working at the Duchy Colliery.

Edward Thorne was also married but without children. He had been in the job of Inspector at Brynmenyn for the previous 18 months, and also had two brothers who were in charge of the Mines Rescue station at Dinas, Porth.

Mrs Thorne was given an oak framed certificate of bravery and 12s a week for one year, (subject to examination on a yearly basis).

FROM THE ARCHIVES:A reminder of those 'Rinking Days' in Pontycymer

ON CASTORS. 4/3/1910. (Anon)

Have you seen the Station road
Or the Drill Hall rinking mode?
There are many patrons who are perfect masters
When you do it's plain you'll fret
Till you pay your fee and get--
On castors.

See them rolling round and round,
With a merry rumbling sound;
They're as loud as any Welsh hwyl pastors
Oh, how joyful and how free
One must really feel to be--
On castors.

Ev'ry sport's off but to skate,
Entertainment's out of date,
Mr. Ebley's artiste's no lasters.
One may spend all day I think
Twix't the sofa and the rink--
On castors.

Do not mind the Council's fear,
Disregard aught else you hear,
And from 'rinking' do not be among the fasters.
Take the risk that comes from fire,
And of rinking do not tire--
On castors.

Though at first it is a bore
Turning somersaults galore,
Spoiling one's good looks with plasters
Soon you'll lose opprobrium
And the graceful art will come--
On castors.

Next edition of the newsletter will be mid-December