



WINTER NEWSLETTER 2025



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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 2025!

Welcome to the festive season once more. In this edition we have some snowy pictures of the Garw not so long ago, an article about Pontycymer in medieval times, a fearless Bridgend barber and a poem. There is the usual bit about what we have been doing and some questions for readers, and if you have any items of interest about Garw life in the past, please let us know – see below for contact details.

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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.

“A LITTLE BIT OF HEAVEN” IN WALES

Printed in the *Glamorgan Gazette*, 24 November 1916



There's a spot that I know,
A spot far away.
Where a man don't go thirsty
All the long day;
Where the heat is not scorching,
And the ground is not dry.
Where green grass doth grow,
And where sand does not fly;
Where a man can walk,
After nine in the morn.
Without getting struck
By that fierce shining sun.



Where flies do not pester,
And Jackals don't howl;
And where after darkness,
The enemy don't prowl.
That place is in Wales,
And its name is Bridgend.
And it's there (though I'm Irish),
My days I would spend.



And now, all you people,
You've read my poor rhyme,
Pity a poor 'Tommy'
Out in this sunny clime;
He's fighting and sweating,
And keeping quite fit,
In Mesopotamia;
A-doing his bit.

L/cpl. 358587. Gerald O'Connell.

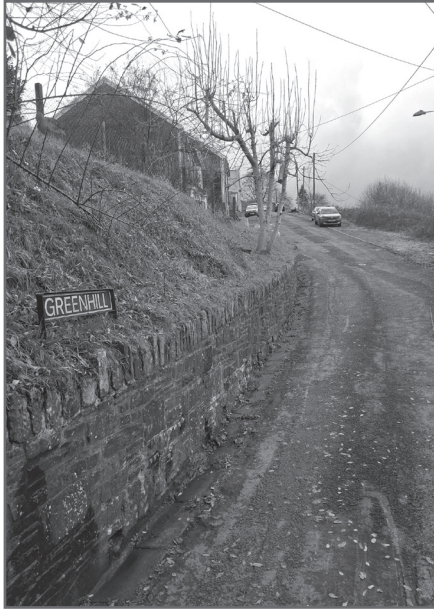
Welsh(Pioneer)Regiment.

Survived the war, invalided out 15/1/1919.

Pontycymer photos © Richard Berry

PLATFORM HOUSES IN THE GARW VALLEY

A site of archaeological interest near Pontycymer



There is, on the hillside in Pontycymer, a street known as Green Hill, an area of land showing evidence of human habitation over many centuries. When the sun is at a certain angle this evidence can be detected of previous agriculture, including what appear to be the remains of demarcation ditches and excavations, running horizontally through the middle of this now-fenced-off section of hillside. The presence of numerous anthills, which may be the source of the swarms of flying ants that occasionally invade house and garden, indicate that this land has not been cultivated for many years.

These excavations appear to be of a regular format, as opposed to the remains of several more further along and to the left of this area, which possibly began as an outcrop of local sandstone which later provided quarried stone for the building of houses and boundary walls for the local farmers. These have been a familiar part of the landscape for generations, with another reason for these excavations being the more recent search for coal, which became ever more important to the economy of the valleys. This drift mining played a lesser part in this economy, but the area contributed through the establishment of forestry plantations consisting mainly of larch trees which provided the mining industry with pit props and other fittings, and provided local wildlife with shelter and sources of food. These trees are now sadly being removed as a consequence of a blight, leaving the bare hillsides we see today.

The result of the establishment of these forestries also led to the discovery of stone tools, a sure indication of human settlement, including scrapers used for processing animal skins: tools which were either discarded or lost by our stone age ancestors whilst hunting in the area before the advent of agriculture. The shortage of suitable flat land for dwellings led to the building of houses on platforms dug into hillsides, as there appear to have been on the aptly named 'Green Hill', which has maintained its distinctive colour as the result of



many years being fertilised by grazing animals, a tradition still maintained by a horse, a goat and a donkey today.

The present-day evidence of platform dwellings on the site consist of several excavations running along the middle of the site with two on the left near the fence in an unfinished condition. The excavations further to the right are obscured by trees, as is an excavation near the bottom of the site near the houses of Green Street. Indeed the trees and the remnants of trees, along with the presence of artefacts, may give an indication of the age of this site with what appear to be the remnants of revetment walls suggesting a degree of permanence, until more suitable dwellings were built or inherited.

Platform houses were eventually abandoned or converted into sheds or animal shelters; indeed the existence of two bungalows on the site is still remembered by residents of Pontycymer today. Further research might give an insight into the people who once lived there and their contribution to the varied and interesting life of this beautiful valley. *David Dimmick*



Blaengarw under snow in 1982.

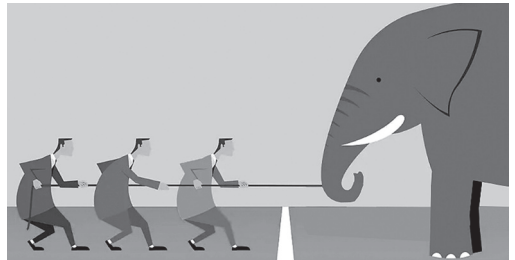
A CLOSE SHAVE

In 1910 Sedgewicks No. 1 American Circus visited Bridgend and Maesteg with its Menagerie of “hundreds of wild animals,” including “herds of elephants and dromedaries.” Amongst the event one that proved very popular with the crowd was ‘Lorenzo the Daring.’ This was the Lion Tamer, who was shaved with a cut-throat razor by a local Hairdresser-Barber, Mr. I. C. Corbett of Nolton St, Bridgend. Nothing unusual you may think, but this shave took place in a cage with twenty lions, with a packed audience looking on. When the apparently fearless Mr Corbett repeated this performance at Maesteg a week later he received a silver trophy and five pounds from the circus proprietor Mr. Sedgewick himself.

An added attraction was the Grand Tug o’ War match, of twenty men against one elephant. The prize for defeating the Pachyderm was a silver cup (to be drawn for by lots)

Seven years later Private 3996 Ivor Charles Corbett, 12th Batt: South Wales Borderers, was severely wounded in the attack on Bourlon Wood and died from his wounds on the 25th of November 1917. He was 32.

After 3 days fighting for Bourlon Wood the 12th Batt: S.W.B. had lost 10 officers and 123 men dead. A further 12 officers and 243 men were wounded, This one action alone earned the 12th Batt: 2. D.S.O’s, 6. M.C.’s, 6. D.C.M.’s. and 11 M.M.’s.



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, and the

Glamorgan Family History’s is www.glamfhs.org.uk

WHAT WE HAVE BEEN DOING



THE FUN PALACE

The Fun Palace event held last year in the Community Centre in Pontycymer was so successful that it was repeated this year on October 4th, in spite of the bad weather which meant outdoor events were brought inside. The GVHS set up two tables which displayed children's toys from olden days, and they proved very popular even if only from a feeling of curiosity. We older citizens enjoyed explaining and demonstrating how clockwork toys worked and dressing paper dollies and making things from clothes pegs – all the things that seem lost with the advent of mobile phones and tablets.

Casgliad y Werin Cymru
People's Collection Wales

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.

THE BALLARAT

As Garw residents will know, the coal mine in Blaengarw started in 1903 was known by several names: the Glenavon, the Glengarw, and more commonly, the Ballarat.

How did it acquire this name?

We have several articles in our archives that refer to Ballarat in Australia, the gold mines that many emigrants from all over the world went to, seeking their fortunes, so was there any connection from possibly an emigrant returning here?

If you know anything please let us know.

We'll print the Ballarat stories in future editions.



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!