



AUTUMN NEWSLETTER 2026



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CROESO I'N CYLCHLYTHYR YR HYDREF!

WELCOME TO OUR AUTUMN 2026 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.

Newsletter design by Richard Berry richardberry66@yahoo.co.uk

In place at last!

THE DANIEL JAMES PLAQUE COMES HOME TO BLAENGARW



The Daniel James plaque, about which we have often written, has finally been laid to rest, or at least found its permanent home, in the wall of the little Strand Park on the main road in Blaengarw. It was originally commissioned in 2020, and was unveiled in March of that year by Huw Irranca-Davies. Its inscription acknowledges the help of the Coalfields Regeneration Trust and the Garw Valley Heritage Society. The park has recently been smartened up and is looking very attractive, with several seating areas for people to sit and watch the world go by. The plaque has been placed near where Daniel James actually lived for a while, just along from the Blaengarw Arms where he wrote the words of *Calon Lân*.



THE TABERNACLE CHAPEL



Tabernacle chapel in Pontycymer is a Grade II-listed building, designated as such by Cadw in 1997. It was built as a result of the Non-Conformist cause arriving in the Garw along with the influx of hundreds of workers for the coal mines. It is a Protestant, Calvinistic Methodist chapel, first established in a stable loft in 1883, moving to the vestry building built in 1884 with the main chapel being built in 1889.

It has been a constant focal point for community activities since then, even though its fellow buildings in Meadow Street such as the Co-Op bakery, the Ffaldau Institute and Billiard Hall no longer function in those roles.

Its pipe organ is one of the few such examples in South Wales still in use for concerts, funerals and weddings, and that alone is something that the Valley should cherish.

Nowadays the religious services are few, with even fewer attendees, and it could be in danger of abandonment as those members, usually our older citizens, gradually pass on.

This surely must not be allowed to happen! There will shortly be more information on the Tabernacle's future, and we hope that Garw citizens will be behind us supporting any endeavours to keep it active within the community.

For more details of Tabernacle's history and events over the years, please contact Jean Fowlds (01656 856091) for a copy of the booklet written by Eileen Price BEM, Secretary and Trustee, sadly now deceased.

***There will be an Open Day event at the Tabernacle on Saturday September 26th,
See back page for more details.***

Do You Remember?

ST THEODORE'S, PONTYCYMER

Canon Graham Holcombe sent us this newspaper illustration and account of St Theodore's, with the information coming from various sources.

Does anyone remember St Theodore's, opened in Pontycymer in 1894 on the land adjoining the junction of Blandy Terrace and Higher Church Street? The image below left is a drawing of the plans by Messrs Bruton and Williams of Cardiff, and the church itself was built by Hatherly and Carr from Bristol. It was designed to accommodate 400 worshippers, both English and Welsh speaking, plus a choir of 24.

The church was built on the estate of Blandy Jenkins, who donated the site for free. The cost of the building was about £3500 which was met by a grant from the Bishop of Llandaff's Fund, together with donations from two ladies from the Talbot family as well as other subscribers.

The opening sermon was preached by the Rev. Z.O. Williams, the vicar of Margam, followed by an evening service conducted by the Rev T C Phillips, curate of the Welsh church in Cardiff.

In 1922 a French organ was purchased for £495 from the Roman Catholic convent in the Isle of Wight, and this was transported by ferry, horse and cart. One can only imagine the noise as it travelled up Richard Street late at night!

St Theodore's was never completely finished as there were often disagreements between the factions. It was decided in 1906 that money for the completion of the church would be used to build a Welsh Church instead (St David's). St Theodore's last service was for Christmas 1962, with snow on the altar, and it was demolished in 1964.



A vintage illustration of St Theodore's Church, and its location today.



KEVIN SINNOTT

© Kevin Sinnott-Sinnott family



We were very sad to hear about the death of Kevin Sinnott, prominent Garw artist known for his portrayal of valley life and people, and who has always been supportive of the GVHS and its exhibitions and newsletters. Our deep sympathies go to his family and friends.

Opposite is Kevin's painting depicting Richard Price's influence on the American Revolution. The painting was displayed at the 2023 commemorative event for Richard Price's 300th birthday, held in the Richard Price Centre in Llangeinor.

The following was published by his family:

Acclaimed Welsh Artist Kevin Sinnott Dies Aged 78

Kevin Sinnott, a defining figure in contemporary Welsh art, has died at his home in Pont-y-rhyl in the Garw Valley. He was 78.

Born in 1947 in Sarn near Bridgend, to Irish parents, Sinnott trained at Cardiff College of Art, Gloucestershire College of Art and Design, and the Royal College of Art in London. He graduated in 1974 and spent the 1970s and 1980s establishing his reputation in London, exhibiting at leading galleries including Anne Berthoud, Angela Flowers and Bernard Jacobson, as well as at the Chicago Art Fair and galleries in the United States. His talent was recognised early, including a prize at the John Moores Exhibition in Liverpool in 1980.

In 1993, Sinnott returned to Wales, a move that reinvigorated his work and rooted it firmly in the landscape, communities and people of the South Wales valleys. It was this year that produced *Running Away with the Hairdresser* (right), now housed in the National Museum of Wales in Cardiff, and widely regarded as one of the best-loved paintings in the national collection. He built his home and studio in Pont-y-rhyl and continued to work prolifically, exhibiting regularly with the Martin Tinney Gallery in Cardiff and Flowers Gallery in London and New York. He worked up until the end of his



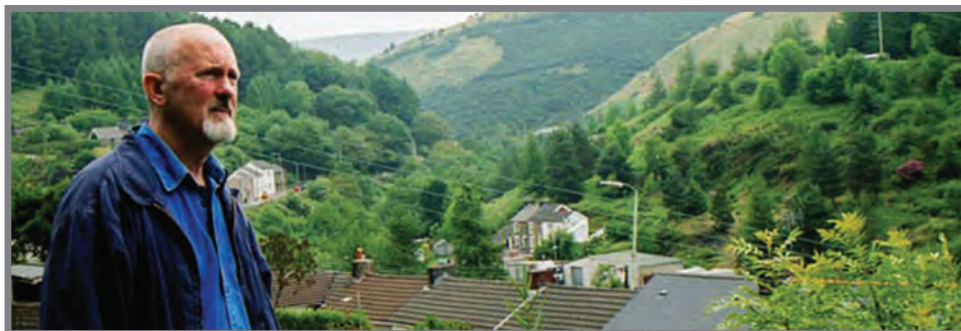
© Kevin Sinnott/Angueddja Cymru - Museum Wales



life, always endeavouring to share his work with others, such as in an upcoming exhibition at Celf Gallery in Cardiff due in September.

Sinnott's paintings have been acquired by a number of major public collections, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the British Museum, the Royal College of Art, and the National Museum of Wales, alongside numerous private and corporate collections worldwide.

He was predeceased by his wife Susan in 2017. He is survived by his four children and eleven grandchildren.



© Kevin Sinnott-Sinnott family

WHAT WE HAVE BEEN DOING

BRIDGEND HERITAGE HUB

Roger and Gerald attended the latest meeting held in Maesteg Town Hall on July 27th on behalf of the GVHS, alongside representatives of the Bridgend Local History Society, St John's House, the Glamorgan Family History (GFHS), Ogmores Local History Society (OLHS), the Signal Box in Cefn Cribwr, the Pencoed History Society, and the Llynfi Valley Historical Society. The Garw Railway Society were not able to attend on this occasion, but sent details of their forthcoming event (*see opposite*).

Every group had projects in progress. The Llynfi group have plans in place for a series of commemorative plaques recognising notable individuals in their valley. The Bridgend and Pencoed societies are also looking at a Blue Plaques scheme. Cefn Gwyrdd at the Signal Box is continuing its initiative with local schools in Cefn Cribwr and beyond, with an emphasis on the industrial heritage of the Bedford Ironworks and the nature reserve in the Country Park. The Nantymoel War Memorial shelter is the centre of a campaign for the Ogmores group, as is the nearby Memorial clock's restoration. The Ogmores group are also currently focused on preparing its 27th annual journal, which will have history and social history of mining in the Ogmores as one of its themes. There were many other projects in the pipeline.

It was good to meet up with all the history and heritage people who are so keen and enthusiastic to ensure their communities' stories do not get forgotten. Even if present generations take our history for granted, we know that future generations will be grateful to have access to the documents stories and photographs that these societies are helping to preserve.

The Ogwr History Month is about to start from September 1st. See opposite for details of its jam-packed schedule.

From the Archives: SALARIES IN 1886!

The Bridgend Chronicle of January 8th 1886 reports on an ordinary meeting held at the Board School in Pont-y-Rhyl. The Vice-Chairman proposed that teachers be paid quarterly and not monthly, and also that the two months' salary now due be paid at that meeting. This was agreed, and cheques were drawn as follows:

Mr. TC Jones, two months' salary	£16.13s.4d
Miss John, two months' salary	£7.3s 4d
Miss Davies two months' salary	£7.
Miss Esther Jones, 3 months' salary for cleaning schoolroom	£3.
Mr Evan Williams, (attendance officer) three months' salary	£3

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

SEPTEMBER The Ogwr History Month

The Ogwr History Month is happening over the whole of September in the Borough, held in a collaboration with Awen Heritage. There are guided walks and talks, films, displays, events, workshops and exhibitions from all over the borough. Examples will be children's workshops in Maesteg and Aberkenfig, talks on the Middle Ages, the Romans, Iolo Morgannwg, Hut 9, Kenfig and Sker, to mention just a few subjects. No-one should feel bored with all these on offer! Please see the 'Ogwr History Month' website for all details of what's available. <https://www.awen-wales.com/news/>

SEPTEMBER 26th: Open Doors event and exhibition at the Tabernacle Chapel

Of special note in September for the GVHS is a mining and social life exhibition of the Garw's last 150 years, to be held in Tabernacle, Pontycymer on Saturday September 26th. Canon Graham Holcombe will be playing a programme on the organ, as he has done in previous years, and there will also be musical recitals by young local musician Megan Marshall. Refreshments available. Posters will be placed around and on our website.



OCTOBER 3rd (Saturday): THE FUN PALACE

The Fun Palace events of the last 2 years are repeated this year on Saturday October 3rd at the Community Centre in Pontycymer.

There will be many areas of interest, 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!!). Keep a look-out for posters which will be placed around the Garw nearer to the date.

DECEMBER exact date tbc:

Santa comes to the Garw Valley Railway

It's a little early for advertising, but Santa will be visiting the Garw in December - more details in due course from the Garw Railway Society.



Gerald Jarvis managing our vintage toys table at the 2024 Fun Palace.

Lest We Forget

ABERFAN RECOLLECTIONS

Aberfan, that terrible disaster, happened in October 1966, 60 years ago. We are reprinting, in a slightly abridged form, an article written for the 50th anniversary 10 years ago.

My first memory of Aberfan was on the 21st of October 1966. I was 18, and working at Method Centre Line, a light engineering company on the Bridgend Trading Estate. We had stopped work for the tea break, and were all standing in a queue for our toast, bantering away as usual. I'd started to tell a joke and was about halfway through and a 'Shush!' rang out. The news had just come on the radio, and we all listened in stunned silence.

Afterwards, we discussed where exactly Aberfan was, and more importantly we talked about HOW? How could a tip just slide down a mountain? Most of us lived in valley towns dominated by coal tips, so what had just happened to Aberfan could potentially happen to us! We stopped every time a news bulletin came in, rushed home to see the devastation for our own uncomprehending eyes. This was not just another mining disaster, we, in Wales were all too used to them; this was another kind of disaster.

What happened that morning at Aberfan, sent a shiver through the collective psyche of a nation. For days, weeks and months afterwards, all conversations seemed to start with "Did you hear about Aberfan? I was when I heard", as if providing an alibi for ourselves.

Our readers are aware that the Garw Valley is developing with wonderful rapidity, and as it even now is only in its infancy, unless the question of school accommodation receives due consideration at the hands of the authorities, we cannot but deplore the great loss this will occasion the children of workmen in the Garw.

Gerald Jarvis



© Magnum



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!

OPEN DAY

FREE ENTRY

AT THE TABERNACLE CHAPEL

SATURDAY 26th SEPTEMBER 2026

10am–4pm Meadow Street, Pontycymer CF32 8HF

Light refreshments • Artefacts • Slide show • Display and Exhibition

MUSIC! Guest organist **GRAHAM HOLCOMBE** will be giving a talk and playing from 11.30am onwards
(This is one of the very few pipe organs remaining in the churches and chapels of South Wales)
also local musician **MEGAN MARSHALL** will give musical recitals



A CADW OPEN DOORS PROJECT
Presented by the Tabernacle Chapel and Garw Valley Heritage Society

Unfortunately, due to the age and design of the building, some areas are not wheelchair accessible