



CYMDEITHAS HANES CWM DULAIS CWM DULAIS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Newsletter – Cylchlythyr

August 2021

Welcome to latest Newsletter – Level Zero this morning!; is this the light at the end of the tunnell regarding COVID? The Society Committee held a meeting recently to consider the situation and start planning for a return to Society activity. We are fortunate that the Band Room in Seven Sisters is still available for meetings but at present we need to be conscious of the implications of spacing and risk assessment for any meetings.

It was decided to wait until September when we will hold another meeting and hope that things will be even clearer in which case we can initiate a new programme. The Committee, as currently constituted, are prepared to carry on until the next due AGM. Please let us know if you have any suggestions for the Club activities.

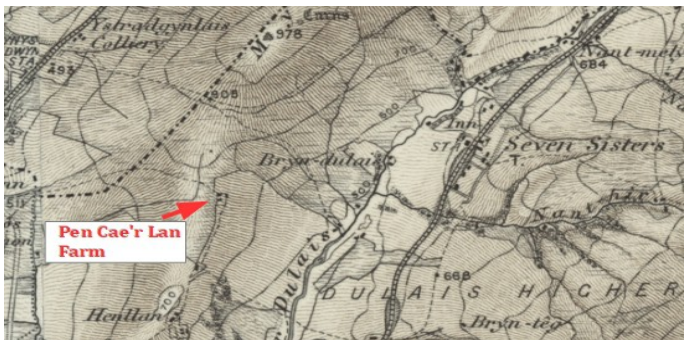
Tim Fearnside, Chairman

*Sadly I have to report the passing away of a long standing and regular member of the Society, **David Price**.
The Society sends its sincere condolences to his wife Joyce and family.*

Patagonia and the difficulties encountered by the Rees family of Pen -cae'r -lan Farm, Seven Sisters

A short resume of the how and why.
contributed by **Eifion Williams**

Rhyss Gwilym Rees¹ of Pen-caer-lan Farm, Seven Sisters as a teenaged youth decided to Remigrate to Patagonia possibly not knowing fully the hardships that the first immigrants had faced.



OS map extract - Location of Farm, Seven Sisters



The Farm ©Dafydd Rees ; People's Collection Wales

At the end of May 1865, a ship, the **Mimosa** set sail from Liverpool with 270 souls on board. They arrived at **Port Madryn** (Puerto Madryn) on the 27th July – Winter time of course. What a disappointment - no welcoming committee as promised, but worse no shelter; the people were forced to live in caves which were not very deep. More disappointment - the land which now faced the Welsh arrivals that had been described as “a fantastic region of Argentina with landscape similar to Wales”, turned out to be bleak infertile terrain, a parched landscape, a barren land with no water, effectively a semi-desert – known locally as “the pampas” (Y Paith in Welsh). There was nothing for it, so the men went in groups to search for the **Chubut Valley**. Travelling across the arid semi-desert carrying their "equipment" in wheelbarrows they found the **Chubut** river with its dangerous “mouth” full of moving sand banks and supporting a small settlement. Here they lived in a fort of some description. The town of **Rawson**, as it grew to be known, became their base and shelter and consequently was the first town for the Welsh settlers.

From **Rawson** the settlers followed the river valley but once out of the valley, the land was for the most part dry. It was through hard work that the river **Chubut** (Y Camwy) was utilized to develop an irrigation scheme (the first in **Argentina**). Devised by a **Rachel Jenkins**, a woman of vision, it watered an area three to four miles each side of the fifty mile long stretch of the river. Two more small townships were established in the valley, namely **Tre-lewis** (Trelew) and the **Gaiman**.

However, with the Argentinian Government doing all in its power to populate the country, using the fact that it was now a fruitful area of land, the Welsh settlers' great achievement was their downfall. New immigrants were attracted by the “productive and fertile land” and the Welsh became a minority group. (In 1940 the Argentinian Government nationalised the irrigation scheme.)

The Welsh explored further and in 1885 (after 20 years) discovered countryside similar to the Welsh lowlands they called **Cwm – Hyfryd** (Cwm Hyfrd). Having now reached the foot hills of the **Andes** the towns of **Trefelin** (Trevelin) and **Esquel** grew in the **Cwm – Hyfryd** (Cwm Hyfrd) area.

This enabled **R. G. Rees**¹ to enter an established Welsh settlement without having to encounter the danger and the unknown faced by his fellow countrymen twenty years earlier: furthermore he went to the foothills of the **Andes** to farm a very big farm. It isn't clear whether the Argentine Government were giving the land to prospective farmers to encourage immigration and/or farming, but **Rhys** was given "Official Title to the Land". Sadly, he died a young man at thirty-nine years of age leaving the question of inheritance in chaos.

The devastated **Rees** family, not knowing exactly what to do on losing the youngest in the family in such a remote country, eventually decided that two of the late **Rhys'** brothers would go to **Patagonia** to see what needed to be done; they were **David Rees** who was ready to embark on a career in the ministry, having successfully followed a course in theology and **William Rees** a qualified Mining Surveyor - both well educated men.



Chubut Valley location

LETTERS

The following letters received by the family describe the hazards faced by the brothers (all were written in Welsh and have been translated.)

Number 1

*Things should come to an end shortly. The "papers" have arrived from **Buenos Aires** to be dealt with through the local courts - if there is no hitch everything should be settled in a few weeks. The way matters are dealt with in the courts is far different from home. Verbal evidence is not accepted. Evidence has to be in "black and white" and each sheet government stamped, each one costing one dollar and with many cases requiring 100 pages or more - what an expense! Both parties submit their evidence to the court officials who could number 4 or 5 judges. Each one reads it for 4 or 5 weeks depending on their station. If each judge agrees then the case is decided for one client or the other; but if one judge disagrees, then it's back to square one. Each sheet must be prepared anew at one dollar a sheet - so the sheets multiply as does the cost. One case lasted 15 years when a man had to prove that a farm had been bequeathed him! I was told that "... I should be grateful and fortunate if my case would end within a year." and as you can see a year has almost elapsed. What I have experienced has opened my eyes.*

*The weather has been fairly dry; the "old folk" believe that the weather is returning to what it used to be before the floods of the last seven years. We've had snow once and some frosty weather but the dry wind has made it very cold. I have not received a letter from **William** for almost two months but there is one on its way according to a note I had from **W. Lloyd Jones** last week. It seems that the **Andes** has had plenty of rain and that the grass has grown well so the animals have plenty of food - very different from last year when food was scarce and the animals suffered; thankfully, this year the animals are in fine fettle and would bring a good price if I were able to sell them - that is, if I had the right. I also understand that **William** is well and looks after everything as carefully as I expected he would. He has built a new house about 2 or 3 miles lower down the valley in order to keep hold of the land which forms a long strip alongside the river but is threatened with the possibility that someone would lay claim to it. He lives in one house for three days and in the other for four. He lives the high life or more correctly the gypsy life. It seems that he is contented although all alone apart from his shotgun, his rifle and the many animals.*

*At present I'm working in the "office" of the local newspaper, **Y Trafod (Y Drafod)** and receiving more salary than before. I am now earning 20 dollars a week. If I succeed in putting the "paper to bed" in five days, then I have the sixth day to myself. I'm waiting anxiously for a letter to arrive at this address but I have not received one, I hope that its on its way. I'd love to hear your news and how you are farming. Will a letter arrive before I leave this place?*

I hope that you are all well and having a successful harvest. I will write again at the first opportunity Remember me to all - without naming anyone.

5th January 1907

*Here I am in the **Andes** once again. I left **Chubut** on 11th of last month and arrived here a few days before Christmas having traveled in a horse and trap with a man who drives between **Chubut** and the **Andes** - it cost 80 dollars. The trap travelled to within 30 miles of my destination. To reach home I was loaned a horse by the trap owner. **William** and I spent Christmas taking back the horse and taking extra horses to carry my belongings (bed and clothes) which I had carried in the trap. Today I am at the Post Office some 30 miles from home (if home - any way it is my present home) The post goes out tomorrow morning and I want to take this opportunity to send word to you to let you know how we are at present. Last winter was seasonal - a lot of rain but only a little snow or cold.*

*Therefore it has been advantageous for the animals. Most of them are in fine fettle. It is possible that I may have a "pass" for some of the oxen this year if I can have things transferred in time. At last the case ended two days before left **Chubut**.*

*I never thought that such a small problem could cause so much trouble. The difference in the names caused the confusion. As you know father's name on the marriage certificate is **David Gwilym** and grandfather's **David Rees Gwilym** and **Rhys** was known here as **Rees Gwilym Rees** and therefore the authorities had cause to raise questions because of the differences (or similarities) with the names. If I had not given a hundred dollar bribe to one of the officials, they were going to seek further proof from the "old country"! The confusion caused all charges*



Local Valley area view

*to be higher than the official charges, and its possible that the case would go on for years. I have not received ownership of the properties, the judge has not given the local Justice of Peace that authority. The cost so far is 1,200 dollars and the J.P. has not submitted his charges! I have borrowed 1,200 dollars from two men I have become acquainted with - one here in the **Andes** and the other in **Chubut** to whom I have given a promissory note for the price of the stock. There are two buyers here at the moment who are prepared to purchase every fat ox over seven years old for 20 to 30 dollars each. It is likely that there will be 50 to 60 to sell if I have the Authority transferred in time. It would be good if I can find a buyer for the poorer animals. But those cattle only fetch 12 to 15 dollars each, and the mares 8 -10 dollars because there is an abundance of them; so you see that isn't much fat (profit) to be had for the others. I will send some money to you as soon as possible for paying our expenses here and also the costs you have borne since we left. I will do that even if it means getting into debt here. If I am unable to clear it all from the sale of the animals, I hope that I'll be able to send it to you by the middle of the summer. I have not received a letter from you since August 1st. I did receive one letter in **Chubut** and that from **J. T. Morgan**. I heard in the post office today that a letter arrived for me yesterday, and it had been sent down by another mail! I don't know who sent it. From now on I'm going to number my letters so that you will know if there is one missing; you do the same and keep copies of each one. The last one I received from **Pencaerlan**² is dated - May 14th 1906 and **William** says "that is the last one." A letter arrived from **Rees Benjamin** on August 14th. He will receive an answer shortly. The last one I received from **J. D. (T. ?) Morgan** was the one I received in **Chubut**. There is also letter here from **Price** and **Catherine**; they will have a reply as soon as possible.*

*We are very busy at this time, having to work with the cows and oxen daily in order to tame them and get them to market, and it is busier for me than for **William**, because I have to travel out of the valley to meet a buyer who visits the area, and to meet a government representative to try and try to bring this prolonged business to its completion. It is an exception that one does not travel for 20 miles a day and some times up to 40. I have hardly been able to move these last few days, I having been riding hard after being in **Chubut** and not riding at all. But I am beginning to harden and becoming more agile and getting rid of my pain. I see from your letter that you want us to return. Well if it were possible we would have returned. Considering everything I would have been happy had we not embarked on this; but having taken the trouble to come here and having the " Right to the Property ", its a must that we carry on with the programme. As it is not possible to sell the stock for a good price, I see no other alternative other than to let them multiply and wait until we have a good price. I therefore cannot see my way clear to return before summer 1908 (that is if I am alive and well).*

***William** is very well and I am also. I hope that you are well and comfortable. May success happiness and comfort follow the New Year.*

*Without naming any one,
Sweet memories,
Your brothers
David and William*

When the brothers **David G Rees** and **William Rees** went to Patagonia to "take care " of their late brother's affairs, they had a torrid time in bringing things to a close. **David** did all the legal work while **William** looked after the farm. Little did they realise that **Patagonia** would become their home - the farm prospered as both were farmer's boys and **David** studied law (in Spanish) and achieved a degree in law.

Last Letter

Dear Brother and Sister

I'm sure that you have been expecting a word from us for a while and I am sorry that I had not satisfied your expectation before now.

Your letter arrived a few weeks ago but I have not been able to afford the time to go to the post until now. The distance between here and the post is 32 miles and this means a journey of three or four days because of the condition of our horses at present. In general, the animals are in poor condition reflecting on the hard winter we suffered.

We had eighteen inches to two feet of snow in June and July over the whole place and it remained on the ground for five weeks with very little melting; some remained on the lower mountain slopes for three months. As I have explained to you before, there is snow on the summits throughout the year, but during the snow storms everything is white from the bottom to the clouds because the summit of many mountains are in the clouds in winter. Many of the peaks are 6,500 to 6,600 feet above sea-level.

*We were sad to read in your letter that **Mary** underwent an operation, but happy to hear that she is recuperating well and we hope that the operation was a total success. It was good to read that she had secured good doctors to carry out the operation. This gave us peace of mind, for the success of any operation depends without fail on the skill of the doctors. We believe that **Mary** was strong enough to come through the operation. At times I long for news from the old country, but another thought comes to me which makes me afraid of receiving one in case the news would be unpleasant, because there is sad news in most letters I receive.*

If we succeed in returning, we cannot expect to find things as they were, and in truth there would be something wrong with the nature of things if we found everything as we left them. The way of the world is different. It moves on and time changes things. Therefore we have to do the best possible in the circumstances and face everything that confronts us on life's journey.

*I'm sure you would like to hear how we live here. I can assure you that it is different from any other period of my life. We do so little walking here that I'm afraid that I may forget to walk and I will have to learn anew or bring my horse with me. We are living in **Rhys'** old house - I sent its photograph to you some time ago.*

The House which was built in the manner of a cob has four rooms. It is built in the manner adopted in this part of the country where timber is plentiful. The timber is then plastered with mud. There is a three hundred foot high rock column behind the house with tall pine trees growing around. Our neighbours are a Welshman and an Englishman both born here but until seven years ago spent most of their lives in New York .

For two months last winter I was on two meals a day but these meals were usually quite good ones. There isn't much work with the animals here in winter except to wander through them now and again to ensure that none are caught up in the undergrowth or trapped in the ditches. It is surprising that some of them get caught in trees. I have seen one cow hanging from a tree with her horns caught in the fork of the branches, and dead of course because we had not seen her in time; she had been trapped trying to reach the leaves on a branch of another tree. Another had caught it's foot in the fork of a tree and was unable to release itself and died of starvation...

William and I are well, hoping that you are in a like state by now. Remember us to our Mam also to our friends and relatives naming them. You will have a letter again before long.

*With warm regards while hoping that **Mary** will soon be fully recovered
Your brothers, **David** and **William***

IN CONCLUSION

When **David Gwylim Rees** and **William Rees** embarked on a mission and travelled to Patagonia in 1905 to investigate their late brother's affairs (He had emigrated there in 1885, owned a big farm with a stock of hundreds of cattle and horses, but had died at the young age of 39), little did they think that they would spend the rest of their days there. After a torrid time, physically, mentally even criminally (if paying bribes to obtain something is a crime); they became the legal owners of their brother's estate. Whilst **David** had worked with lawyers and judges to prove who they were and to claim their inheritance - their legal right to the property - an exhausting struggle which lasted two years. **William** had looked after the farm.

When they became legal owners, both worked on the farm but it fell to **David** to negotiate prices with the animal dealers. He also helped his neighbours with this task so that all the farmers in that area were all getting better deals. This led to **David** negotiating on their behalf on other matters, for example, pertaining to land ownership and other agricultural matters. This meant that he was spending less and less time on the farm. **David** decided he would do this type of work permanently having gleaned much experience from his two years fighting for the farm and in the process, he studied the Law gaining a Degree in the subject. He married and they had a son (**Gwyn**) whose wife (**Martha**) opened "The Welsh Tea Shop" in Trelew. Unfortunately, **David Gwylim Rees** died before he formally graduated and received his Degree.

The Welsh Tea Shop was handed down to **Anna** (Gwyn and Martha's granddaughter). As another talented member of the Rees Clan, **Anna** whose first language was Italian, decided to trace her family tree and learn Welsh. She spent some time in Wales (as part of the course) learning and teaching groups of learners before gaining her Degree in Welsh and graduating from the University of Wales, Trinity Saint David collecting her certificate on 11th July 2014. She was the first Patagonian to gain such a degree. About the same time Anna was awarded the Chair at the Annual Eisteddfod in Patagonia with a poem entitled "Pencae'rlan". She still runs her grandmother's teashop in Trelew and teach Welsh.

From **Pen -cae'r -lan**, a farm near Seven Sisters to **Pencae'rlan** a poem by a native born Patagonian composed in Welsh - Has the Wheel turned The Full Circle ?

Notes

¹ **Rhyss Gwylim Rees** also referred to as **R. G. Rees** and **Rhys**. Youngest brother of **David** and **William Rees**

² **Pencae'r lan** (Translation; Highland Meadow) is mentioned in the Dataset of Valley Farms (referred to in the last Newsletter) as the "highest farm on the Drum" and "possibly associated with the Abbey". It is also listed in the Dulais Valley Heritage Sites listing.

Weighbridge: Banwen Roman Road

contributed by **George B. Evans**

Installed in 1914, according to the late, Mr Edgar Pugh who died at the age of ninety nine in 2020. Its use was to weigh the house coal allowance awarded to each miner who was a house holder. The house holder was entitled to thirteen tons [of anthracite] a year; one ton for every lunar month.

If they had let a room and/or a bedroom, known as “having apartments”, which normally occurred when the rooms were let to a young couple waiting to be allocated a company house (most often a newly married own son or daughter), the young couple would be awarded an extra six loads of coal a year. This meant that house would receive in total nineteen tons of coal per year.

There are 64 houses in Roman Road, at least a quarter would have apartments, that's sixteen houses would be allocated nineteen loads of a ton of anthracite coal a year equalling three hundred and four tons. The remaining forty eight houses on thirteen loads at a ton per load equating to six hundred and twenty four tons. Thus making an overall total for that one street for a year of nine hundred and twenty eight tons!



Roman Road Banwen



Avery scales Roman Road Banwen

When I signed on at Banwen Colliery December 1939 there were twelve hundred men employed there; its official name was Onllwyn No 3 but the original name was Maesmarchog Colliery. Of the twelve hundred men at a guess eight hundred were householders.

That would be $800 \times 13 = 10,400$ tons.

When I was in school the coal was hauled one ton at a time by horse and cart. Then it was a six day working week - so by hand $33\frac{1}{2}$ tons a day had to be

loaded and delivered for the workers' households!

Immediately behind the weighbridge was the Banwen Quoit* Pitch. It has seen a number of International players perform there, including **Nick Kelly** and **Solly Harker**, to name but two, who played for Wales against Scotland. Sadly, over the years the Quoit Pitch fell out of use. Then thankfully **Peter Weavers** arrived as the Head of Open cast mining in Wales. He had the pitch restored and fenced-in.

The young Englishman's attitude to the people, whose homes were surrounded by working Opencast sites, was quite different and more positive than those who had been in charge for the previous thirty years! To celebrate the pitch's restoration the International Welsh Quoit team turned up for a day of exhibition games. This being very much thanks to the efforts of **Mrs Pat Parffit** of Seven Sisters, only daughter of **Solly Harker**, **Brian Penny** of Swansea and **Eric Jones** of Dyffryn Cellwen.



Quoits Pitch Banwen 2006

* Quoits

A game played with metal discs, traditionally made of steel, and thrown across a set distance at a metal spike called a pin, hob or mott. The spike is centrally, and vertically, positioned in a square of moist clay measuring three feet across.

The long game

Sometimes called the '*old game*', this version is played in Wales and Scotland; Scotland had around a dozen clubs, now reduced to one which is based in Stonehaven, under the control of the Scottish Quoiting Association, whilst Wales has only a few clubs, most of them in Dyfed and Powys.

In this game, the top of the spike is flush with the clay, so encircling the pin is not a significant part of the game. The long game has similarities to the game of bowls, in that a player scores a point for each quoit nearer to the pin than his opponent. The hobs are 18 yards apart, while the quoits are typically around nine inches in diameter and weigh up to 11 pounds, almost double that of the northern game.

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quoits> Accessed 23/07/21

NEWS ITEMS

St Patrick

Pursuing the interests of our President, George B. Evans a little further, he was mentioned by the First Minister of Wales, Mark Drakeford, during a Zoom meeting to remember the Saint Patrick's Day in March. More recently a series of celebrations were held on June 12th and 13th when working alongside the Landscapes of Faith festival, the village hosted Roman soldiers and pirates to re-enact the kidnap of Patrick and his sister, Darerca from Banwen.

It is George's proposition that Tafarn y Banwen (*Taburnaie Bannavem*) is the real birthplace and site of Patrick's kidnap around 1500 years ago. During the recent activities, the belief was expanded to include remembrance of all victims of human trafficking and modern slavery today. Although this year's gathering was still affected by COVID restrictions it is hoped that next time the function will be open and accessible to a much wider audience.

Family connections (received by Tim Fearnside)

I have received an email from an enquirer based in the Midlands who is trying to find more information about a relation who 'came from the Cwmdulais area. Her name was Ann Bevan born around 1867. She subsequently married a David Williams and they lived in Tredegar until her death in 1930'. I understand Ann's mother and father were...

William Bevan and Margaret Thomas (b. Cadoxton)

1833–1907

1835–1889

Married in Swansea - Died in Neath

Lived in and around Seven Sisters including a place called *Penrhingrig, Upper Dulais*.

Any information you might have would be welcomed by the Harrison family.
