



CWM DULAIS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

CWMDEITHAS HANES CWM DULAIS

Newsletter - Cylchlythyr

May 2021

*It is with extreme sadness that the Society announces the passing of one of its most stalwart and long standing members, **Margaret Mary Amrar**. She played an active and supportive role in the community not least as Postmistress in Dyffryn Cellwen and richly deserved the honour of the BEM awarded to her.*

Margaret was an enthusiastic member and regular attender at Society meetings with a passionate interest in history. She joined the Committee and subsequently became Treasurer, keeping a close eye on our financial activities.

The members are now even more indebted to her. She has bequeathed a considerable sum to the Society maintaining her determination to encourage and prolong the continuation of CDHS into the future. Not only this, but she has also donated a number of books from her collection which will be available and valued for research and reference by the members.

Rest in Peace Margaret and thank you so much for everything.

Seven Sisters School Centenary - an ex-pupil's memories

by Joy Howells

1930's -

The School consisted of three buildings :-

Infants ————— **Mixed school**

Girls' ————— **Lower building**

Boys' ————— **Top building**

Infants' school :-

Headmistress Miss E. Rees

Lessons were taught in Welsh – even our Arithmetic.

The smallest children in Miss Griffith's class had a nap each day after lunch – we each had a little low bed almost on the floor. The childrens' Christmas pageants were enjoyed by parents.

After leaving the Infants' school, the girls and boys went to separate buildings and never met again for lessons or activities.

We were actually more scared of visiting the Boys' school than visiting the Dentist whose surgery was located there!

1940's -

Girls' school :-

Headmistress Miss R. J. Rees

During wartime school windows were all taped up. When air raids happened we sat in the corridors singing loudly to drown out all other sounds! This was conducted by Miss Rees.



Seven Sisters School from Railway Bridge
Commercial Street

We had been timed running home as soon as the air raid sirens sounded but it was decided to keep us in the school – perhaps we didn't run fast enough!!

Around this time evacuees arrived – children and teachers. Our school was strange to them and we were equally fascinated by their accents and strange names.

Every morning the school bell was rung before 9 o'clock to call us to school. It was rung again at 9am to indicate the formal beginning of lessons. Only the 'big' girls rang the bell which was hanging outside the building but the ropes were pulled from within the classroom now known as Standard 1. We all longed to be allowed to ring that bell.

Next to the Headmistress's room was the cookery room. It was a very special room as it always spread the aroma of nice food. Miss Price was our teacher at this time. (As a tiny baby I was bathed in this room as part of a Home Craft lesson.)

The large hall was often divided to form two classrooms. Two huge wooden partitions running on brass grooves acted as dividers and could be moved back to create the hall. This facility was used on special days as a venue for wonderful jolly concerts.

After we reached the age of ten we were ready for the Scholarship class with Miss Thomas. If we passed, we went on to Neath Grammar School but.... if not, we went on to the Top Class and maybe got to ring the school bell!



Seven Sisters School from Pen y Banc

At this time there was no canteen but we were allowed to eat our packed lunches in one classroom. Bottles of milk and straws were given out at lunchtime and breaktime. Then, in about 1942, a canteen was started at Salem Vestry for children living far from the school. On one day in particular in 1944, when we tried the Scholarship, the whole class went to the canteen as the rest of the school had the day off. (We had prunes and custard for dessert.)

Mr Bevan, the school caretaker, who lived in the house just off the school yard, was kept very busy. The yard also had a lovely high wall to bounce a ball against. We had no toilets in doors – they were in the yard as well.



Heol Hen today

Great excitement was evident when the Photographer came to the school.

On reflection, there seemed to be so many sunny days – we often enjoyed classes in the yard, nature walks down the old lane (now Heol Hen) and then further on down to the Cwm.

Regular swimming lessons were given at the local baths.

“School days were Special Days at Seven Sisters School.” Joy Howells

A FAIR AT BANWEN

Contributed by George B. Evans

There was never a shortage of entertainment for the people of Dyffryn Cellwen and Banwen to look forward to in the nineteen twenties and thirties. There was the Annual Show and Sheepdog Trials sponsored by David Martin Evans & Bevan. The Show took place on what we called the Zinc's now the rugby field. A team of workmen prepared the field for a week:-



*Fair Field - Rugby Ground today
Looking towards council houses*

- **a horse racing course** - riders and horse came from far and wide, three of the jockeys were local riders Colin Kemeys, Cyril James and Wren Jenkins of Seven Sisters,
- **a show jumping arena** - in the centre of the racecourse.
- **a timbering competition area** - timber was brought on a railway trolley from the timber

yard at Banwen Colliery, in the form of French niner's chosen by the miners that were going to compete. (Editor's Note: a "niner" is a timber about 9 feet long and 12 inches in diameter used as the horizontal bar in underground timber arches.)

- **an area for the Ropesmiths** - to demonstrate their art of wire splicing.

In addition, there was a competition for the best turned out colliery horse in harness, tug-of-war competitions including, in the evening, pulling a full coal wagon up a gradient after finishing the shift for the day.

There was always a novelty competition climbing the greasy pole. At the top of the pole a shoebox filled with confetti would shower on to the winning competitor when he reached the top and pulled the ribbon. A prize of £5 (Today's value about £350) was given, enough to buy a new suit from the 50 Shilling Tailor's at Neath and have 50 shillings (£2.50) in the winner's pocket.

In 1937 a boxing ring for Mark Podger's Boxing Club was introduced, Mark being one time Imperial Service Welterweight Champion. The boxing ring was erected at the Moorland's end of the field along with two army bell tents, one for the Red team and one for the Blue.

Team members

Red

*Dai John Harvey
David Vernon Edwards
George Evans
Derek 'Bomber' Edwards
Billy 'Tiger' Pittard*

Blue

*John Hughes
Rodger Hughes
Frances Regan
Douglas Morris
Billy 'Spirits' Davies*

Each bout was of three, three minute rounds. The silver-plated cups, given as prizes, were provided and presented by Mr David Martin Evans Bevan. Cups with handles for the winners, cups without handles for the losers!

Fourteen year old, David Vernon Edwards was awarded the trophy for the Best Boxer of the Tournament. Sadly, Vernon was killed aged 21 serving with the 2nd Essex and two other regiments, the South Wales Borderers and the Gloucesters, in the assault on a strong point near Le Havre on September 13th 1944. An old school class mate, Iolo Lewis, who had served with the Royal Tank Regiment located Vernon's grave on a 'D' Day visit. Vernon is buried at Ste. Marie Cemetery, Le Havre, France. His name was put on the Cenotaph at Seven Sisters on 2nd of November 2002.

Iolo one time pupil at Maesmarchog School was twice wounded and one of the first British soldiers to enter Belsen.

The sheepdog trials were held in Blaen-nant-cellwen's big field. The holding pens were up in the far corner of the field by Mr Tom Watkins' back garden, with the obstacles place along the breast of the hill, to give everyone a good view of the competition. The final pen was opposite Maple House then the home of Mr Treharne under manager of Banwen colliery. The colliery at the time employed 1200 men.

Then there was the arrival of Scarretts Fair and Boxing Booth. The great cavalcade would arrive on a Sunday if you didn't see it arrive you'd be able to hear it arriving. Belching steam traction engines hauled the huge wagons that carried the large brightly coloured carousel with its prancing horses and striding ostriches, the marvellous steam organ that would fill the village with sound, the small merry-go-rounds, swinging boats, chair-o-planes and the tents for the coconut, roll-a-penny and hoopla shies. The great striped tent of the Boxing Booth and the boxing ring and the traditional wooden brightly, painted caravans of the fair people were also drawn by steam engines.



St David's Church

The Fair would occupy the land from Saint David's church, the land now occupied by the council houses, once called Heol Marchog to the first bungalow.

Construction of the fun fair began first thing on Monday morning; by Monday evening it was up - music blaring, lights blazing, carousel turning its prancing shining horses and striding ostriches rising and falling with their first smiling customers astride their backs.

Electricity was generated by the traction engines whose highly polished bodywork, gleaming brass and stainless steel, brightly painted wheels, standing on solid rubber tyres, shone and glittered in the lights.

The fair people, drew their water from the stream that rose from a small bog fed by a spring above School Road, there was no cemetery then. It ran down behind School Road then turned to go behind Saint David's Church to join Nant Cellwen in front of Maple House.

The fair's boxers arrived ready to fight on Friday night, Saturday afternoon and Saturday night. In the week they worked as colliers, farm labours or in some other manual work but at £1 a round, a bout of three rounds amounted to one week's wages for nine minutes work!

At one time there were two Welsh Champions living in Dyffryn Cellwen, Billy Ward and Billy Pittard father of Billy 'Tiger' Pittard. Billy Ward trained in the shed which my father and his brother Jim, had built in our garden to keep their 'Aerial' motor bikes. They had bought them on leaving the army in 1919. The shed was suitable for Billy's punch bag because it had a wooden floor.



Nant Cellwen today

One of Wales's most famous boxers, Tommy Farr, fought for Scarrett's in his early days and his one time sparring partner Will 'Boxer' Owens came to live and work in Banwen. Dai Boxer his son still lives here in the same house.

For me the highlight of the Boxing Booth coming to Banwen was Dai Farmer, he had served in the 4th Welch with my father and was a Scarrett fighter. On Friday and Saturday night when the fighting was over he'd come to our house for a wash and supper. The water in the bosh by the back door would turn pink with the blood of other people that had dried on his chest - he sponged it off with a flannel. The 4th Welch was a Llanelli battalion, mainly Welsh speaking; my father would, at the end of the evening, walk with his old comrade back to the caravans on the Fair field. On Sunday, Dai would head back, by bus, to Carmarthen. By Monday the Fair was gone.

News

Information from Editor, George B Evans & Norman Burns

Global Centre of Rail Excellence



Possible Nant Helen test track site

The plans for a Global Centre of Rail Excellence in Onllwyn and on the Nant Helen Open cast site seem to be progressing. I have found a number of recent online reports which seem positive. It would provide a tremendous boost to the settlements at the top of the Dulais Valley. We look forward to further announcements.

Plans - Welsh Government video

[Global centre of rail excellence - YouTube](#) Accessed 3/05/2021

Global Centre of Rail Excellence funding confirmed 29 March 2021

The Welsh Government has confirmed a £50m capital funding loan to Powys Council to support development of the planned Global Centre of Rail Excellence testing facility on a former mining site. This follows the UK government's announcement of up to £30m of funding in its spring budget.

[Global Centre of Rail Excellence funding confirmed | Rail Business UK | Railway Gazette International](#)

Accessed 3/05/2021

The £150m Global Centre of Rail Excellence project, which is being driven by the Welsh Government, is earmarked for a mothballed opencast mine at Nant Helen and a nearby coal washery at Onllywn - covering both the local authority areas of Powys and Neath Port Talbot councils.

It will showcase Wales as a hub for research and development and leading low-carbon rail technology. The facility will support UK train manufacturers with the capacity and capability for rigorous testing of rolling stock and rail infrastructure, from prototype to implementation.

It will provide an electrified 6.9 kilometre high speed rail testing track for testing speeds of up to 110mph, with an inner testing track of 4.5 kilometres, for testing speeds up to 40mph.

The project is estimated to create 250 jobs during its construction and around 200 permanent jobs when completed by 2024.

[Global Centre of Rail Excellence project in South Wales expected to get £30m Budget funding boost - Business Live \(business-live.co.uk\)](#) Accessed 3/05/2021

Another question - Editor: Can you help?

I am looking into a property called *Langport House, Onllwyn* for an enquirer. She reports that she has found a reference to the name on the 1911 census but it also refers to it/them as "the huts" or "tin huts". Can anyone help us with this? The researcher asks... "*Would you have any details of what these were like, i.e. photos or descriptions of size, etc.?*" Thank you – my contact t.fearnside@yahoo.co.uk

Dulais Valley Farm Names

by Eifion Williams and Editor

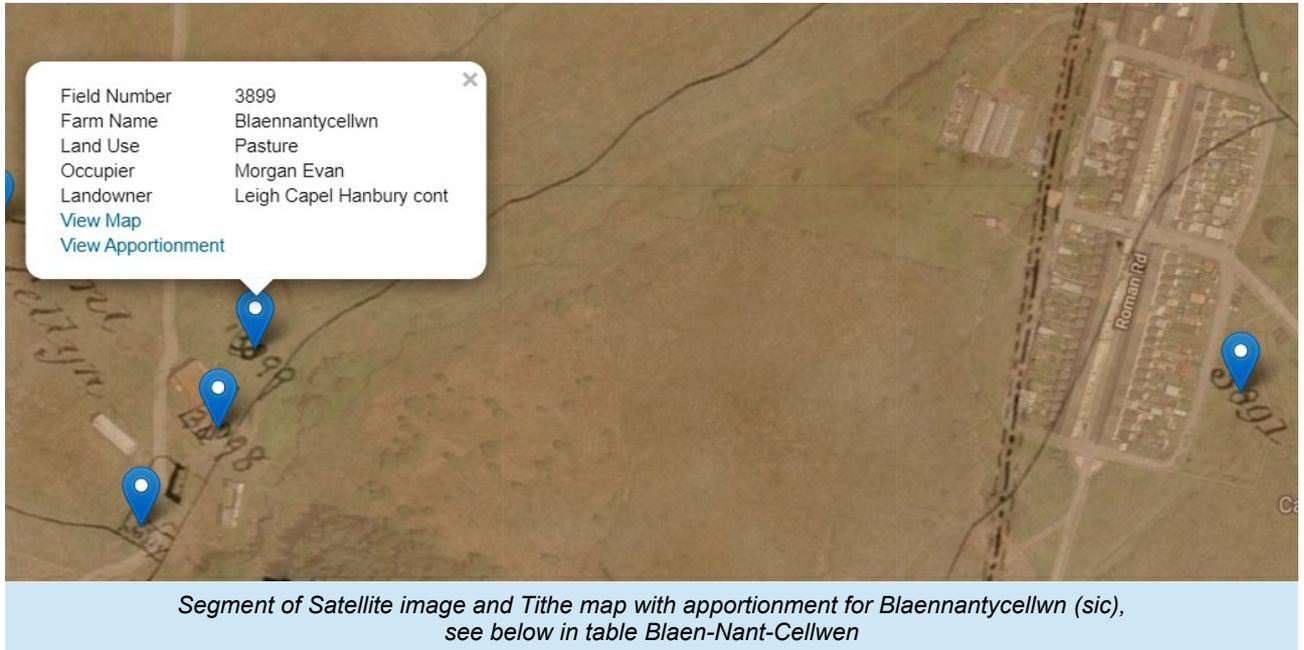
Eifion has compiled a list of local farm names in the valley. In addition, he provides a translation together with some background information indicating possible/ likely derivations of the name.

In tabulating his list, I have taken the liberty of seeking out the sites where possible on the Tithe records which were mentioned in the last Newsletter. Many of the names are listed in those records and give both the contemporary name and the property details (owner, occupier etc.).

What is interesting is the variation in name spelling – it is quite fun at times trying to match names on the Tithe record with for example the Ordnance Survey and the local version provided in Eifion's list! Clearly he is well aware of this, hence his opening remark on his data as follows:-

“Very often names given to farms often describe their terrain and location, but care must be taken when analysing these names as spellings are changed (corrupted) along with pronunciations with some history lost in the process.”

It occurs to me that this initial list, a section of which is shown below, might provide a interesting project for the Society to research and bring together sources of local data and knowledge such as Eifion's list with existing Tithe map and apportionment records in the National Library of Wales. These places have already been digitised and georeferenced to modern satellite imagery so geographic locations in terms of Latitude and Longitude area readily available as seen in the extract below for Blaen-Nant-Cellwen.



Sample extract from newly tabulated data supplied by Eifion Williams. The whole list will be added to the Society website in due course.

Name	Translation	Background story
Bach -y- Gwreiddyn	A root growing in the bend of a meander.	
Blaen Llech	The source of the Llech.	
Blaen Buarth Fach	The small cattle shed	but known as 'Blaen bu-artach (a member of the Gymdeithas was born on the farm)
Blaen Nant Melyn	The source of Nant Melyn.	
Blaen- Nant- Cellwen	An original Long-house at the source of Nant Cellwen	
Bryn Bedd	A farm built on or near a cairn.	Ironically part of its land was bought to house the local cemetery also called Brynbedd
Bryn Caer	Yet another farm built on the site of a Cairn.	