



CYMDEITHAS HANES CWM DULAIS CWM DULAIS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Newsletter – Cylchlythyr

September/ October 2021

Welcome to latest Newsletter. Back in August the Committee held a meeting to consider the COVID situation and hopefully 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.

It was decided at that time to wait until September to hold a further meeting in the hope that things would be clearer in which case a new programme could be initiated. Unfortunately, our reading of the current circumstances is that we still cannot risk restarting group meetings especially indoors. The implications for members and visiting speakers is not acceptable.

Our plans therefore are on hold again – in fact it may be 2022 before meetings recommence even though I am aware of other similar groups starting up elsewhere across the country. The Committee, as currently constituted, are prepared to carry on until the next AGM. Please let us know if you have any suggestions for the Club activities. For example, would there be any interest in a Spring/ Summer programme with outdoor projects?

On a personal note, as Editor, I must thank everyone for the positive feedback and comments about the Newsletter. I must also emphasise how very fortunate I have been to receive numerous articles from members since it began. However, items are running out and therefore any new stories would be very welcome.

This Newsletter concentrates on People of the Valley and the variety of contributions they make/ have made to the Valley life and community. Are there more such stories out there?

Best wishes to everyone.

Tim Fearnside, Chairman



Extract from: Western Mail 16th August 1982

Origins of the names Blaendulais and Seven Sisters and stories of residents

Both names are familiar to most of the present day residents but there is no harm in repeating the well-known !!

Blaendulais or Cwmdulais was a small hamlet consisting mainly of farms standing each side of the River Dulais in the Dulais Valley - a typical Hanging Valley, with the Neath Valley being the main valley.

Seven Sisters was later adopted as the village name simply because the pit which was sunk in 1872 was given the name Seven Sisters Colliery by David Bevan's son E. Evans Bevan (aged 18) so the story goes because he had seven sisters. The men who worked at the colliery, naturally stated that they were going to Seven Sisters. The name Blaendulais was still being used as shown in 1800, when in the Rechabites there was a Blaendulais Tent ; but gradually Seven Sisters became the accepted name.

People of the Dulais Valley

Submitted by Eifion Williams

Not unlike most valley villages, Seven Sisters is proud of its achievements in many fields including Sport, the Arts and Sciences.

SPORT

RUGBY

Seven Sisters R.F.C./ Club Rugby Blaendulais dates back to 1897 when the first official game was played in a Friendly match against Ystalyfera. However there is said to be evidence that rugby had been played in the village at an earlier date of 1893. The Club has produced three International players namely:

- **Philip Davies** with over 40 appearances in the Red Jersey and a Llanelli player at the time.
- **Glyn Shaw** with over twenty caps while playing for Neath R.F.C. and
- **Phil Pugh** with one cap, specifically picked it was rumoured to keep The All Blacks in check! Phil also played for Neath R.F.C.

Keiron Jones toured with a Welsh XV to Tonga and Japan but no caps were given. The Club achieved W.R.U. status in 1948 and during the 1950's/60's was dominant in the West Wales League. In its day it has produced many players for the bigger South Wales clubs and has had two University Blues, namely, **Darryl Jones** and **Dennis Gethin**. Dennis later became Secretary and Chairman of the W.R.U.

ASSOCIATION FOOTBALL

Seven Sisters A.F.C. whose first team was called "*The Old Blues*" was formed in the early 1920's and lasted 4 years. The "*Stars*" club was formed shortly afterwards followed by the "*Black and Tans*" in 1929. This team had a remarkable second season - winning all of its games but one which was a draw and consequently winning The John Hando Cup that year. The club is now named **Seven Sisters A.F.C.** and plays in the Welsh League.

DARTS

Oliver James won the "News of the World" tournament in 1954 – the major Open UK Darts Competition of the day.

A report from the time reflects the local and national interest.

"Pandemonium broke out in Earls Court, London, on an evening in 1954, when 6,000 wildly excited darts enthusiasts, many of whom travelled up from the Dulais Valley saw a 52-years-old Seven Sisters grandfather, Oliver James, beat the cream players of the country to become the first Welshman to win the much coveted "News Of The World" individual darts championship of England and Wales."

<https://patrickchaplin.com/2019/09/19/oliver-james-wales-first-news-of-the-world-champion/>



Des Owen represented Wales on several occasions.

WEIGHT LIFTING

Clem Mathews broke many record in his weight division.

CYCLING

Lee Watts won the Welsh Junior Championship.

JUDO

Rhys Thomas became Welsh Junior Champion.

TABLE TENNIS

The N.F.S. Table Tennis Club's reputation spread beyond the Welsh boundary and produced many excellent players. But one event in its history is unique - when England's Table Tennis team played Wales in 1953/54 at Aberdare the Welsh Men's team were all **N.F.S. Seven Sisters Table Tennis Club** players, effectively meaning the match was England vs Seven Sisters. The players from the Seven Sisters Club were **Stewart Jackson, Ken Pittard, David Phillips, Lynn Evans** and **Eddie Burford**. On the womens' side however, it has to be admitted that the two lady members of the team played for **Newport Table Tennis Club**.

David Phillips also won the Welsh Open Championship and another Welsh International player from the village during 1939 was **Mrs Winnie Thomas** (nee **Williams**).

Overall Sports Trainer/Coach

Ron Morris received the BEM for his input into sport in the village as trainer/coach and provided encouragement and inspiration in all kinds of activities.

ARTS AND SCIENCE

Every village community has its famous people. Some who do not leave the village boundaries yet their contribution to village life and growth has been very important.

MUSIC

Such a person was **John Owen Williams A.L.C.M.** who remained in the village all his life. He was described by the *Illustrated Weekly News* (a national London newspaper) dated 23 November 1912 as "*The Wonderful Welsh Boy*" - because he had been awarded the A.L.C.M. (Associate of the London College of Music) for pianoforte playing at the age of twelve, the youngest person to have received that award. He was to become the founder member and only conductor of **The Martyneers Male Glee Party** in 1922 - initially named Owen's Glee Party . The group raised tens of thousands of pounds for charity giving concerts in Wales and in England.

John Owen as he was known in the village became the organist and choir master of St Mary's Church and with an augmented choir of children performed an opera annually . He also conducted the local mixed choir. In addition to these local activities he was in great demand by Eisteddfodau throughout South Wales as an accompanist.

A stained glass-window in St Mary's Church is dedicated to **John Owen's** memory.

Another musician who gave his all to the village was **David Morgan** who became better known as "*Morgans the Bandmaster*". He conducted the **Seven Sisters Brass Band** from 1900 as a young seventeen year-old until 1941. Under his baton the band won numerous competitions including three National Eisteddfod successes in 1928, '32 and '36. He also conducted the village mixed choir.

POETRY

Over the years, the village has been blessed with poets. One such was the **Rev. Seymor Rees**, minister of Soar Chapel (1927-1945) and a resident until his death. The Rev. Rees was a poet, author and historian. He won numerous Eisteddfod chairs at "semi-national' level and a number of Eisteddfod crowns.

Among local poets who also did well at Eisteddfodau but are remembered mainly for their ability to commemorate village events (both humorous or serious in Welsh or English) in verse are **Dulais Davies**, **Toriel Williams**, **Gwilym Davies** and the **Rev. Edmund Davies** a minister at Soar Chapel.

ENTERTAINMENT

In the Entertainment World the village was not lacking. Apart from the Brass Band, the local choirs - male and mixed voices, all performed their annual concerts; the **Youth-club Drama Group** would entertain the village audience at least once a year. Many of these societies would travel to other villages (near and far) to give concerts each with its own supporting artists.

One entertainer was **Haydn Hayward** who appeared on TV on "*Opportunity Knocks*". Others (too numerous to name) spread their wings and joined the Welsh National Opera, the B.B.C. Choir and other cultural societies. One who did stay was **Collin Price** who has lived in the village most of his life. Born in Dyffryn Cellwen, he started work in the colliery at Banwen then after many years as an amateur he became a full-time entertainer in 1968.

SCIENCE

The village has produced a number of authors and in the World of Science, the name **Glanville Harries** comes to the fore. Born the son of a miner, he became the Chief Scientific Officer to the Admiralty and was responsible for putting the first British Satellite into space using French Rocket Power in 1968. He was awarded the O.B.E. for his work in the Field of Communications.

Just like all other villages it can boast and name individuals in the world of politics, education, engineering and medicine .

Another well known Dulais Valley character recognised



Please see attached photos from Gramps (George Evans) displaying a box (with contents) from Buckingham Palace thanking him for his services in the Second World War.



It includes a china mug, medal, bottle of vintage port, tea towel, chocolate and a DVD of war songs.

Contributed by

Naomi (George's granddaughter)

Dulais Valley Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) – A Member's story

by Joy Howells

In the early nineteen eighties there were serious concern about the threat of Nuclear Warfare. What did the future hold for our children and indeed was there a future for any of us?

We could only wait and worry UNTIL one evening two young women from Birmingham held a meeting in the village to discuss this national issue. They were knowledgeable, informative and enthusiastic to impart what we wanted to hear. Particularly that CND groups had been set up all over the country.

As there were local Historical members present we were able to discuss forming a local CND group. The Dulais Valley Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament was formed, regular meetings were arranged and speakers were invited.

Now meeting with similar groups from Ystradgynlais, Neath and Port Talbot it was realised we needed a banner – one to be easily recognised and one we could be proud to unfurl at every opportunity.



Our first rally at Hyde Park, London was a truly amazing experience, we stood in the midst of thousands of like-minded people, listening to politicians and public figures, eloquent speakers all, which was heart-warming and comforting.

As we joined more rallies we saw and heard the General Secretary of CND, **Monsignor Bruce Kent**, who was a first-class leader. After a meeting he would always find time for an informal chat.

We were offered a lift to a rally in Nottingham, one evening by my friend **Mair Tim** (n.b. definitely not the Editor!) and I waited for the lift while the snow was steadily falling all around us. We were ever so pleased to have **Norman Burns** to join us; he was our CND secretary and a very good friend. When we arrived in Nottingham our vehicle slid down an icy road to our destination! **Mr and Mrs Guy** were spending the night in a Church Hall with other CND members so left their house to us for the night. The house was welcoming, warm and comfortable. We sat and introduced ourselves to each other then chatted until we ran out of talk before retiring for the night. Next morning at breakfast everyone complained a snorer had kept them awake. I did not complain - I slept soundly and heard nothing!!!!

The following day there were huge puddles everywhere and the mounted police seemed to take pleasure from trotting through them and consequently splattering us with muddy water. We joined the rally that day and overnight slept in a huge marquee with hundreds of others. If you fell into a space, you were stuck there and could not move, even with a boot in your back and one almost in your face. All for the cause!!



In February 1984, we joined a sit down blockade at Molesworth; another cold, freezing day when we sat on blocks of ice, cushioned by pads of newspapers. It must have been extremely cold. Even the policeman were affected and having to dash across the snow covered fields. We went to a *lay in* at London Road. Some motorists were hostile but most gave encouragement with a toot and a thumbs up. (Much like response to environmental protesters on the M25 today?!)

Some events were pleasant - on sunny days we protested outside the American Embassy and the Russian Embassy. The people inside may not have realised what was all the fuss about but we certainly did.

Through the years when we needed help with our travelling expenses, jumble sales and fetes were held. We also made Christmas cards helped by our supportive Chairman, the late **Reverend David Bryant**, who printed all our cards for us. We then sold them whenever possible whilst on our travels, for example, at service stations. Fellow travellers from all over the country were pleased to buy them and thereby support us. (Thank you David).



My most memorable visit was to Brecon Cathedral, which was filled to capacity, where we heard a thought-provoking sermon. I had never heard a man of the cloth speak in so out-spoken a manner. As we all went away, it left us with much food for thought.

Our campaigning had come to an end and my traipsing around the country was over for the moment.
