



CWM DULAIS HISTORICAL SOCIETY CWMDEITHAS HANES CWM DULAIS

Newsletter - Cylchlythyr

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Blaendulais – Seven Sisters A story of School life

by Joy Howells

Originally Blaendulais was an agricultural area consisting of scattered farmsteads located towards the top of the Dulais Valley. In 1872 Mr Evans Bevan decided to sink a pit in the area. He had small terraced houses built to attract workmen to sink the pit (sinkers). Later he built a public house (Seven Sisters Hotel) near the entrance to the mine as was his custom. He had inherited a brewery at Cadoxton to ensure an ample flow of beer in the valley. Mr Bevan had seven daughters so the mine, village and later the school bore the name Seven Sisters. Some years later there were over 3000 employed in various mines in the Dulais Valley. In 1908 a single storey school was built in the village with toilet blocks in the school yard. On opening day 125 children were admitted. The first few years were problematic at the school as the children suffered from many illnesses - laryngitis, mumps, measles, whooping cough, scarlet fever, diphtheria and even cholera.



In time, more accommodation was needed at the school so two more buildings were erected – a girls' school and a boys' school were situated one either side of the original building which now became an infants' school. Sometime later, two sisters, both fluent Welsh speakers, came down from Wigan to teach at the school. Miss E. Rees (Miss Rees fach) eventually became Head of the infants' school and Miss R.J. Rees (Miss Rees fawr) became head of the girls' school. They were strict but also caring and considerate. When children had long walks to school on rainy days there was a supply of warm dry clothes for them and their own clothes would be dried and ready at home time.

I started school at the infants' department in 1936 and was very happy. The staff members were very kind and what is more, there were little trestle beds in an empty classroom for children to have a nap after lunch. I enjoyed that very much and over eighty years on I still like a nap after lunch. It really was a lovely school.

This was not the first time I had visited the school. In 1933 the local midwife was due to visit the school to give the older girls a demonstration on how to bath a baby. Miss Rees invited Mrs Sherwood to bring her 14 week old baby (me) to school for the demonstration. (Many years later a woman told me I “had cried throughout the lesson”. Another time a woman reported I was “a good baby without a murmur at all” !!!)

In 1939 World War 2 was declared,. During air raids we sat in the corridor and under the encouragement of Miss Rees sang as loudly as possible to drown out the drone of the planes overhead. Our gas masks were carried to school daily. When we had to try them on sometimes it

could be frightening but often we found it amusing watching our classmates struggling with their straps.

At this time we were taught in Welsh. Although many of us were from English speaking families we settled to our Welsh very well. In 1940, evacuee children and their teachers from Gillingham came to the school. This time it was not the 'Welsh Not' that deprived us of our language, but the kindness of the Welsh children who had to speak English to the evacuees. Some evacuees never returned home after the war, although at least one brother or sister did. Miss Rees must have been dismayed as she had persevered to have Welsh spoken in the school. However, she now introduced us to Esperanto, which we all enjoyed.

In 1944 Naval Officer Winchester on board HMS Exeter visited the school to tell the children about his voyages to the Pacific. His daughter Cherry was an evacuee in our class at the time. When she went back to Gillingham she kept in contact with some of her school friends until fairly recently. Later, we were very sad to hear her father had lost his life on his ship.

We seemed to have a lot of sunshine. Classes were often held in the school yard and we were taken on nature walks down Heol Hen and on the Cwm (Nant Hir) where we played games at the river side. On very special days we made a trek up to the wimberry mountain. If we found a suitable place to sit we could fill our containers with wimberries without moving from the spot. Little did we know that in the first century Roman soldiers had marched from the fort at Neath, Nidum, along the top of Hir Fynydd, now known as the Roman Road (Sarn Helen) on their way to the fort in Coelbren and then to Abergavenny. This indeed is local history.



This early schooling proved a good foundation for further education and I always retain pleasant memories of my Seven Sisters school life.

As mentioned, when I left school for further education I was grateful for my attendance at Seven Sisters school and always look back on my headteachers with fondness and respect. There have been many changes in later years. A purpose built

nursery was constructed as was a large canteen. The Girls' school is now an all Welsh School - Ysgol Gymraeg Blaendulais while the other departments, I am pleased to say, became Blaendulas Primary School.

At last! Blaendulais is now back on the map!!!



Locations related to the article

Copyright Open Street Map

News extra

Western Mail
16th August 1982

The Western Mail ran a series
"Why I live in"

Joy contributed to this and her article was published as shown.



Copyright Western Mail

Dulais Valley picture quiz (Solutions next time)

Can you identify the locations and features?

Do you have any current information about activities or condition of the sites?

Please let me know or send a short story for the Newsletter.

Remember today's information is tomorrow's history.



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3.



4.



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