

February Newsletter 2003

Calgary Welsh Society

CYMDEITHAS GYMREIG CALGARY

Editorial Contributions - by e-mail send to betrol@sprint.ca - or phone (403) 246-5093. Letters, send to Roly Thomas at 134 Country Hills Gdns. NW, Calgary T3K 5G2. **Our new Society PO Box # is Suite 527, 7620 Elbow Dr. SW, Calgary T2V 1K2**

Croeso I'r Flwyddyn Newydd – Welcome to the New Year: Unavoidably with the turn of the year we are all (and without exception) one year older. But even if time does tend to fly by us at an alarming rate - we remain as old (or as young) as we choose to be! Yet again, your Ed. is raring to go: to bandy with words: to keep you informed and to seek your participation in our unique cultural relationship - as we now approach the centenary (in 2006) of our Society's association with the City of Calgary!

Society News: For your information the Society's **new PO Box mailing address** has been highlighted in the newsletter heading. Again our provincial re-registration has been done - **and the details of our FORTHCOMING EVENTS are as GIVEN below:**

St.DAVID's DAY DINNER: Saturday, March 1st, 2003. This traditional function is to be held at **The Coast Plaza Hotel**, 1316- 33St.NE (as for our last Christmas Dinner). **Timing will be 6.30 pm for 7.00 pm. Tickets are priced at \$28.00 each.**

**** CHORAL & CELTIC DANCING ENTERTAINMENT & MORE ****

MAKE ALL CHEQUES PAYABLE TO: CALGARY WELSH SOCIETY and send to Kathleen Giffin at 152 Riverbrook Rd. SE, Calgary T2C 3P3 (Tel: 720-8127). **PAYMENT IN FULL MUST BE RECEIVED BY FEBRUARY 21ST, 2003.**

Note: NO TICKETS WILL BE SOLD AT THE DOOR!

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2003/04 - Saturday, April 26th 2003, 6.30 for 7.00 pm. – at the RIVERSIDE CLUB located at 110 Point McKay Crescent NW (at the junction of Bowness Rd. and Shaganappi Trail.) **A buffet style meal will be provided at a cost of \$15.00 per head. PLEASE ADVISE Roly Thomas by APRIL 15 NEXT re: NOMINATIONS for ELECTION of EXECUTIVE OFFICERS for the ensuing year.** The meeting format will be as for last year! **Again, SEND BUFFET / SUPPER PAYMENTS to the Treasurer - BY APRIL 17th 2003! ENTERTAINMENT PROVIDED!**

The need to insist upon the timely prepayment of ticket costs for these two functions is regretted by the Society. However, since it has had to absorb all recent 'no show' costs from Society funds it is only fair and reasonable that the interests of all members be protected in this manner. The Society had to pay \$307.41 regarding our Christmas Dinner 'defaulters'!

Cymdeithas Madog – Cwrs Cymraeg 2003: The Red Leaf Scholarship (Ysgoloriaeth Y Ddeilen Goch) is being offered by Pawl Birt, former President of Cymdeithas Madog who is Professor of Celtic Studies at the University of Ottawa and veteran tutor of Cwrs Cymraeg. The scholarship will assist one Canadian citizen (age of 30 or younger) to attend. Funds of US\$550 will be applied towards tuition cost for the Cwrs for one student sharing a dorm room at Carthage College, Kenosha, Wisconsin USA.

Applicants with a basic knowledge (incl. use) of the Welsh Language may seek further information from Wayne Morrissey, Cymdeithas Madog Scholarship Coordinator, 2505A S.Walter Reed Drive, Arlington, VA 22206-1207. If considered eligible for a Cymdeithas Madog scholarship and/or to hold a place on this Welsh Course (held July 20–27, 2003) please send a deposit of US\$100 by cheque, payable to 'Cwrs Cymraeg 2003' - **by April 15, 2003** - to the following address and for the attention of

Dick Myers, Local Organizer, Cwrs Cymraeg 2003, 549 W, Manor Circle, Bayside, WI 53217-1735

Promoting Welsh Arts: The Information Manager of The British Council, Canada (via the British Consulate-General in Vancouver) contributed this piece of news. "Wales is a UK country of approximately 2.9 million people. The arts in Wales are rich and diverse. Welsh language and culture have been celebrated since pre-Roman times and many of the **traditional arts have evolved into innovative and contemporary forms.** Wales Arts International is a one-stop shop for Welsh artists working internationally, aiming to increase the international activity, profile and influence of Welsh art. It creates opportunities for Welsh artists to work abroad; develops tools for international marketing; builds international arts initiatives and supports Welsh artists' tours abroad. The Wales Arts International web site is currently undergoing a massive redevelopment and promises in the New Year to be **an exhaustive source for information on Welsh arts.**"

Did You Know that long time member and U of C Prof., Wayne Davies, is from '**The Ponty**' - a place that was somewhat obliquely mentioned in our last newsletter. He dug deep for some interesting facts about his hometown - and had this to say.

“After Roly’s description of ‘his Ponty’ (Pontardawe) it does seem appropriate to put the record straight - in good argumentative Welsh fashion. The REAL ‘Ponty’ in Wales is, of course, **Pontypridd**, home of world-class singers like the late Geraint Evans and the evergreen Tom Jones, Neil Jenkins (top points scorer in world rugby) - AND birthplace of the Welsh national anthem!

Lying twelve miles north of that so-called ‘capital city’ (without a good rugby team) at the junction of the Taff and Rhondda valleys - it was the major commercial centre for the coal mining settlements in these areas. It is renowned not only for its open-air market and for one of Wales’s best parks, *Ynysangharad Park* - a name that still flummoxes the visiting English! But before industrialization it was famed for its single-arch stone bridge over the River Taff, the longest such structure in the world for well over a century after its construction by William Edwards in 1755. It was recognised as an engineering wonder - because of the three large voids or ‘holes’ (located at both ends of the span) designed to reduce the thrust magnitude that would otherwise prevent the achievement of a stable arch. When the bridge was built there was no town where the two rivers merge, only a little ‘earthen hut by the bridge’ that gave the town its name. In those days it possessed narrow densely wooded valleys, rapidly flowing rivers full of trout and spectacular rock outcrops that attracted many Romantic Age tourists in search of the picturesque - scenes that were glowingly described by Benjamin Malkin’s tourist book in 1803.

Of course, this pastoral solitude did not last. Coal mines were developed in the lower Rhondda from 1790; the Glamorganshire canal that was built to connect Merthyr to the docks in Cardiff in 1794 provided easy access to the area and led to tram lines bringing coal from the Rhondda and also the relocation (from London) of the famous Brown and Lennox iron and chain works in 1808; whilst the infamous (?) Crawshay family of the iron-making town of Merthyr a dozen miles to the north, developed a tin works in the neighbouring village of Treforest in 1820. Other iron works, small industrial plants and coalmines soon transformed the area from its pristine beauty. But it was the junction of the two rivers that developed as the most important commercial centre north of Cardiff in the Valleys, with a service hinterland of over a third of a million people within a twelve miles radius by the end of the nineteenth century. The town grew around a series of road and rail bridges; I can think of at least eight within a mile of the town centre, confirming that it literally is a ‘ponty’. Yet this local and regional importance was more than outweighed by the international significance of its Chain Works, which produced the anchor chains for most of the big British built steamers and warships that dominated the world in the nineteenth century. Also, its prized steam coal was exported all over the world. Obviously, *my Ponty was contributing to globalization long before the term was even thought of!* But this, of course, was not all; the town of forty thousand showed its world leadership in the boxing community when Freddie Welsh won a world championship in the WW1 period. As the girl from Roly’s Ponty, Mary Hopkins, sang in my youth: ‘*Those WERE the days my friend!*’ But unlike her hope for the future, they did end! The Great Depression and the gradual decline of the coal industry in the next forty years hit the area hard.

But what was it like to grow up in this town? I have always felt privileged to being brought up in the area and valued the free health care, grammar school and university education provided by that reforming post-war Labour government. Certainly my three-bedroom terrace house facing directly on the street was hardly a palace; it only had gas for lighting, a cold-water tap and a toilet at the bottom of the garden until well into the 1950s. There was the constant noise of coal-trains passing down the valley, a mere 80 yards away. The river Taff was the same distance in the other direction. It ran black all year. For years I thought all rivers were black; after all, there was strong empirical evidence for this observation and *all* the rivers in this part of South Wales had the same colour - perhaps to match the black Non-Conformity of the area. But I can still remember that memorable Christmas when we were staggered to see it turn brown; the collieries had stopped their operations!

As boys we were free to range up and over the valley sides and to the plateau above. Here there really were larks in the sky, winberries on the moors, blackberries galore, trout in the streams and primroses on the edge of the bluebell woods. We could wander on the plateau and be in another world, seeing no sign of the industry in the bottom of the valleys below. When it snowed, we had toboggan runs down the steep hillsides but with suicidally abrupt endings in some hedge. When it did not snow the slopes were steep enough for grass sledges and for bowling rocks down the hillsides. How nobody was ever hurt always mystified me. Our parents never worried about our long absences. We never stayed in that other ‘rural’ world for very long; home, or rather food, in our terraced homes was always the magnet, ensuring our return! But amongst the scruffy, be-capped generation I grew up in, there was one saving grace; we all had shiny shoes on schooldays. This was a mystery for many who passed by, for no young male of my acquaintance in those days ever laid hands on shoe-polish or a brush. We should all be ashamed letting ‘Mam’ clean our shoes! But my good fortune was not simply to grow up in a town that had, what we would now pretentiously describe as so many ‘environmental riches’ to play in. Moreover, it was a mere half hour by train from the ‘metropolis’ of Cardiff with its big stores and its international rugby matches; but it was always spoilt by those shop assistants who used to tell us ‘to go back to the valleys where we belonged.’ Perhaps my friend Roger’s unfortunate passion for ‘stink-bombs’ had something to do with it!

Most valley communities are not the same today; there is still a lack of jobs and worthwhile work. The decline of religion and of the ‘cooperative’ tradition, the increasing selfishness in post-Thatcherite British society, a tide of crime and violence, and the lack of investment in infrastructure have led to a bleak picture for many a valley town. Yet the people are still as lively and friendly as you will find anywhere. The trees are growing again; no longer are the ones left by the coal barons chopped down by kids in search of bonfire wood. Coal tips have been removed - but only because of the sacrifice of the children of Aberfan. The rivers are clean and trout have returned. But it still rains and rains and rains. Yet Ponty may be luckier than most; its commercial

centre is still busy; the big industrial estate built in Treforest to alleviate unemployment in the 1930s thrives; and it is an easy commute to prosperous Cardiff, fortunate to get all that government money to transform itself. What I knew of the old Mining School in Treforest became first a Polytechnic and is now the University of Glamorgan, but most staff commute from the vale and Cardiff. Students have overrun the village where I grew up leaving many locals bitter at some of their anti-social activities when the pubs close and the way that so many houses have become 'bed sits'. Yet I still shudder at the public sector vandalism that tore down a jewel of a Victorian railway station and replaced it with a shed or two - and the way that Crawshay's replica of Stonehenge was bulldozed away to create room for the polytechnic's expansion. But at least the gatehouses of the never completed Druidic Museum planned by one of Wales's most eccentric characters, Dr. William Price, are still there on the other side of the valley. At a time when burning bodies was considered a sacrilege, this was the man who cremated his dead son (named Iesu Grist Price - in English, Jesus Christ Price) on Llantrisant Common in the early 1800s - even charging admission to the public. He was acquitted in a subsequent court judgement - perhaps due to the influence of some persuasive Ponty 'talkers'? That Treforest should have become the site of the first crematorium in Wales is a fitting ending to this saga; after all, it could also be the last site for most of the denizens of the area!

But I must add a few other things. Tommie Woodward (a.k.a. **Tom Jones**) *did* come from Treforest, my part of Pontypridd. My mother *did* sell my high chair to Mrs. Woodward - since when I always wondered if Tom *did* absorb the rhythms I battered into its top? What if I had failed the '11 plus' (grammar school entrance examination) and devoted myself to music, high-heeled shoes and building shoulders? Tom is not the large man he appears to be from camera angles - at least those shown on TV. But think of the fate I would have suffered! A nightly bombardment of 'knickers'! No thanks, Tom! Those hundreds of exam scripts that any teacher has to deal with might not be so bad after all! So, despite Tom's exhortation to 'Keep your hats on' in a certain recent film about unemployed males in Sheffield, it may have been the apparently joyful loss of his audience's undergarments that led some hometown lads to try and emulate the film stars in search of their fame. Or were they just boasting? Who knows? What is simply wonderful is that they called themselves wait for it *The Full Ponty*!! The eccentric Dr. Price with his fox-head hats *would* have been proud or should this be - that the local lads with the local crematorium in mind, needed 'no shroud'? unlike our modern Druids and their invented tradition."

Good Old Aunty BBC To the Rescue Once More: I'm grateful to Malcolm Page for bringing this information to our notice. It will certainly be of considerable value to those wishing to learn more about the 'mother tongue' and involves BBC Wales who are about to launch a new Learn Welsh website www.bbc.co.uk/learnwelsh/. A rundown of the key features of this programme's are,

- 1) 'welsh in the workplace' - featuring the 3D virtual learning town, Jonesville, with hospital, post office, bank, garage, shop etc.
- 2) 'jonesville/' - where you'll need Flash, be able to scroll down the page and then match the speed of your Internet connection.
- 3) 'scenarios/' - to watch work-place based Welsh RealMedia video clips and then be able to test yourself.

These three references, contained within 'my apostrophes', are simply added on after the last / mark of the quoted website.

- 4) Welsh dictionary' - featuring a 60,000 English/Welsh/English online reference dictionary for which the site connecting code is a little different to the first three items as - www.bbc.co.uk/cgi-bin/wales/learnwelsh/welsh_dictionary.pl. An accompanying 'spellchecker' requires the following coding - 'welsh_speller.pl' - to be added after the '/learnwelsh/' component - while a mutation checker - 'welsh_mutation.pl' - can also be incorporated in a similar manner.

All this information is contained in what is published as the 'Catchphrase newsletter' obtainable via catchphrase@lists.bbc.co.uk. With the next newsletter issue (#138, Jan 10 - 2003) the Catchphrase newsletter changes its name to the 'Learn Welsh newsletter'.

This has the promise of being an exciting development by BBC Wales. I'm sure that many of us will be looking in!

Montreal St. David's Welsh Society: This organisation has an age advantage over us of three years and are proudly celebrating their 100th anniversary this year with a series of functions extending from February 26th to March 2nd.

R'ydym ni yn dymuno ein llongyfarchiadau llawen i bobl gymdeithas Montreal!

(We offer our heartiest congratulations to the members of the Montreal society!)

Interestingly enough, the associated Montreal Male Welsh Choir has its origins even farther back in time - when in the middle 1850's a group of North Wales quarrymen, who had just finished construction on the Menai suspension bridge, were brought to Montreal to work on the Victoria Bridge spanning the St. Lawrence river. Construction was finished in 1860 and the singing quarrymen took part in the opening ceremony conducted by the then 18-year-old Prince of Wales who ultimately aspired to become Edward VII. Many of these construction workers remained in the Montreal area - becoming part of the Welsh Speaking Union, the forerunner of the Montreal St. David's Welsh Society.

It's a very small world: Having finished the book she had recently been reading (while sunning herself beside the hotel pool in Varadero, Cuba) your Ed's better-half noticed that there happened to be something of a 'little library' in the towel exchange kiosk - books probably 'donated' by forgetful vacationers over the years. She exchanged her finished volume and picked one up by authoress Cynthia S. Roberts - born in Tonyrefail, Mid-Glamorgan and now living in Porthcawl. The local 'Heritage Coast' provides the setting for her novels. Four of her books are, 'A Seagull Crying', 'The Running Tide', 'Upon Stormy Downs' and 'A Wind From the Sea'.

Yet Another S-Wales Scribe: When I arrived in Calgary in the late 70's I was surprised to see a regular UK interview programme featured on Channel 13. I think it was called *Mavis Asks*. At that time Mavis Nicholson had achieved success as a TV interviewer after being a full time mother for some ten years. She was in her forties when she presented her first TV series *Good Afternoon*. A number of other programmes followed including *Mavis on 4*. The surprise to me was that Mavis was a good friend of mine at UC Swansea: we studied geology in the same class and regularly commuted together to the college campus. Her enormously successful collection of women's wartime memoirs *What Did You Do In The War, Mummy?* was published in 1995. In 1999 she published her second book *Martha Jane & Me*. Mavis (nee Mainwaring) attended Neath C.C. for Girls and lived in Briton Ferry. She and journalist husband (Sunday Times sports columnist) Geoff met at UC Swansea. They now live in Powys.

Current Membership Statistics: Paid-up memberships so far this year number a total of 72 persons - ranging from individual to family memberships and life-memberships. Surprisingly, our records also show that a number of long-time members (representing at least another 21 'bodies' - including some who are particularly active in the Society) have not yet paid their dues for this almost ended year. We are all aware that little things can easily get forgotten - so if this note raises a doubt in your mind about the fulfilment of your own personal obligation, please ring Kathleen (or your Ed) so that your curiosity may be satisfied!

For the record, the Society's membership charges are: Family, \$25.00; Single Adult, \$15.00; Senior, \$10.00.

By any comparison, the price of membership in our Society is far from being a costly consideration - yet it would appear that many who enjoy our social and celebratory functions (and our newsletters) find it difficult to reach into their pockets and make a suitable gesture of appreciation! How about it you folks - **JOIN THE SOCIETY OR, at least, MAKE A DONATION!**

Welsh Societies in Canada: The research that Dave Matthews undertook over the last year has brought into focus the fact that there are currently 25 active Welsh groups in Canada, from sea to sea to sea. The provincial distribution is: 7 in BC, 3 in Alberta, 3 in Saskatchewan, 1 in Manitoba, 7 in Ontario and 1 in each of Quebec, New Brunswick, PEI and Nova Scotia. We now have contact information for all of them. David's listing has also been circulated to all these associated Canadian/Welsh organisations.

The Passing of a Welsh Political Icon: The son of a miner (who also happened to be a pre-WW2 Labour MP in the Neath Valley) Roy Jenkins, latterly Lord Jenkins of Hillhead, died on January 5th last. Born in Pontypool (yet another 'Ponty') in 1920, Roy Jenkins attended Oxford University, did his wartime military service and was elected as a Labour MP in 1948. Apart from his political success as a cabinet minister (in a number of high profile portfolios) he was a phenomenal writer, a respected historian and a highly regarded biographer of Winston Churchill. Many considered him as the 'Grandfather of New Labour'. Having become disenchanted with the old Labour regime he founded the short-lived Social Democratic Party, advocated proportional representation for Westminster and the adoption of the Euro! Tony Blair has not yet subscribed to his hero's wishes!

Hollywood in the Valleys: Richard Attenborough is in the process of building a 'Valleywood' - a billion dollar Welsh film studio to rival any in Hollywood. He is thrilled with the project and stated that his greatest ambition 'was to lure Tony Hopkins back to Wales'. The studio site is at Llanilid, between Cardiff and Bridgend - a complex likely to match Universal Studios. The idea has already attracted the attention of a production company owned by Catherine Zeta Jones. One could ask if Wales is turning the tables on Hollywood - or perhaps finally getting revenge for the 1941 Oscar-winner *How Green Was My Valley* being shot in Los Angeles - and not the Rhondda mining village in which it was set! Attenborough said it would be marvellous if Hopkins (now a US citizen) returned to his homeland. Backed by a British financial institution, believed to be a bank, Lord Attenborough thinks he can attract filmmakers to the Valleys as he will be able to cut production costs by up to 28 per cent. The new studio, larger than Pinewood and Shepperton together - and equipped with cutting-edge technology - will be Britain's first since MGM's Elstree Studios, where Attenborough played Pinky in *Brighton Rock* - back in 1948.

Happy Retirement Bob Willis: An article by David Parker in last Sunday's Calgary Herald (Jan 26th) recognises the work of Bob Willis as a film producer and director, artist and travel lecturer - who has had a tremendous impact on Calgary's business scene. Needless to say, Bob and his wife Jean (who often attend our functions) are obviously well known to the Calgary Welsh Society. We have also experienced his artistry at first hand - with his production of *Wales in Spirit and Song*. Bob's first travelogue was *The Best of the Canadian West* and its success persuaded Bob to continue with the travel/lecture presentation format. Bob has donated the tools of his trade and a film library, containing incredible footage of Alberta history, to the Glenbow Museum where they will be available to researchers. The Society wishes Bob a long and happy retirement and good winemaking!

Panic in the Nudist Colony: It was reported today that someone had been running berserk in a North Wales nudist colony while armed with a bacon-slicer. A local police officer, Const. Jones, had a tip-off this morning. He should be back on duty tomorrow!

Please DO NOT forget the March 1st St.DAVID's DAY DINNER or THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING on April 26th.
