



## May Newsletter Issue - 2004 Calgary Welsh Society



### Cymdeithas Gymreig Calgary

**Comments & Contributions:** Send to Roly Thomas at [betrol@sprint.ca](mailto:betrol@sprint.ca) or phone (403) 246-5093 or mail to 134 Country Hills Gardens NW, Calgary, AB. T3K 5G2. Visit the Society website for a wealth of information at [www.calgarywelshsociety.com](http://www.calgarywelshsociety.com)

**The 2004 AGM** This business plus social event at the Irish Cultural Centre on April 24<sup>th</sup> was reasonably well attended by some 30 members. While the business end got sorted-out in double quick time the film show component suffered from the sabotage inflicted by our own 'Dai R.A.' squad who, incidentally, were ably assisted by the Irish Club barman. Despite the disappointment (and provided Dr. Wayne Davies does not lose the prize video) we live to enjoy its pleasures another evening!

On the recommendation of the previous executive (as proposed in the last newsletter) a new board was elected by popular acclaim. We welcome Philip Morris to this body as Treasurer and are sorry to see Katharine Lewis leave. However, it is pretty certain her involvement will continue – to exert the sort of influence that all successful presidents expect! Thank you Katharine!

**Meet the new Board** Please note the following names for future reference. Feel free to contact any of them should you have a concern – or wish to pass on some useful news for our benefit. This listing will be posted on our website!

**President: Alun Lewis, 247-2267 / Vice – Pres: Maurice Benson, 258-2588 / Social Secretary: Kathleen Giffin, 720-8127**

**Secretary: Dave Matthews, 249-5483 – Address: 6907 Lamont Court SW, Calgary, AB. T3E 6G5**  
**Treasurer: Philip Morris, 398-8331 – Address: 4304 – 24 Hemlock Crescent SW, Calgary, AB. T3C 2Z1**  
**Phone Committee Leader: Jean Kuhn**

Society members who kindly volunteered to assist the executive as **Board Members at Large** are:  
**Veronica Everton-Williams, Wayne Davies, Tom & Dianne Williams and Dave & Liz Elson**  
**Newsletter Editor: Roly Thomas**

**Cymric Choir - June Visit** This Port Talbot male voice choir arrives in Calgary on Thursday June 3<sup>rd</sup> and will have a series of engagements in Alberta and BC. The Calgary concert will be at the Grace Presbyterian Church 15<sup>th</sup> Ave. SW, Tuesday June 15<sup>th</sup> at 7.30 pm. Tickets @ \$15.00 each (Seniors \$10.00). They will be in Edmonton, June 11<sup>th</sup> and Ponoka June 13<sup>th</sup>. **Contact Viv Ellis for more details at (403) 239-5018.** The choir's itinerary is posted on the Society's website!

For the uninformed, the seaside town of Port Talbot/Aberavon is the 'Hamilton of the Principality' - having been the centre of the South Wales steel industry almost since Adam learned to work in iron. In your Ed's student days, the wondrous Abbey Works at Margam was the very first of a new generation of mammoth steel plants to be built after WW2. The townships of Port Talbot and Neath (also extending to incorporate your Ed's 'Ponty') were amalgamated into one large municipal area some years ago!

We wish the choir a successful visit to Western Canada and to Calgary in particular. We look forward to hearing them and to meeting them! **Pass on this information to your friends, your neighbours - and to anyone who enjoys good choral singing!**

**Dydd Gwyl Dewi 2004** Our keynote **St. David's Day** celebration was an outstanding success - both from choice of venue and the traditional entertainment that was enjoyed. Historic Fort Calgary was discovered as an appropriate location for our sentimental gathering and provided a most pleasant surprise regarding its food and facilities! Guests Dr. Cledwyn Haydn Jones and wife Julie (both now Society members) were devoted to reminding us about the quality of our cultural heritage. Cledwyn, is blessed with a melodious voice ideally suited to penillion singing ('penillion' meaning verse or stanza in the English vernacular) - and an art form that is peculiarly Welsh. Julie accompanied Cledwyn on flute and piano. Together they capped off the evening with a reading of the Dylan Thomas classic, **Under Milkwood**. Iwan Saunders again provided the formal piano accompaniment for our function. 52 members and friends thoroughly enjoyed this 'hiraethol' (nostalgic) annual get-together!

On the initiative of Dave Matthews, we were able to get some very good publicity for our patron saint day from Shaw Cable, Channel 10. A short two--minute programme was superbly compiled and presented by Lisa Holliston - and featured Cledwyn Jones, Alun Lewis and Philip Morris. While we know Cledwyn as an established academic, Alun and Philip also came across as credible members of a clean-shaven, well-tailored, daffodil-bearing *Cymru ar wasgar* (far-flung Welsh) intelligentsia!

**The Two 'Ponty' Boyos** Their successful careers went in very diverse directions; one had a voice, the other an enquiring mind: one was a 'County Boy', the other failed his 'eleven-plus': one teaches the science of our earth's surface while the other travels it from airport to airport for world-wide engagements! Both however shared the same highchair as infants in their native Pontypridd - and both finally (and fittingly) met again in Calgary last March, so many years later! Needless to add, the two 'valley boys' are well known to all of us in the persons of the 'one and only' Tom (Woodward) Jones, singer and entertainer – and, Prof. Wayne Davies, dedicated CWS member over so many years! Happily, both remain down-to-earth 'Taffs'!

## May Newsletter Issue - 2004

### Calgary Welsh Society

The May/June newsletter of the Victoria Society merits mention regarding two articles of note within its pages. They are brought to your attention - the first being typical of your Ed's experience and the other being of historical interest to those of us living in North America. We are indebted to Victoria Pres. Denis Brown and to fellow member Gwyn Solomon for the items. Enjoy them!

**Leek Brings Memories** As you may remember, Captain Fluellen, in Shakespeare's Henry V, reminds the king that, 'I do believe your Majesty takes no scorn to wear the leek upon Saint Tavy's Day, and the king replies, 'I wear it for a memorable honour; for I am Welsh, you know good countryman.' (Note, even in Good Queen Bess's days, 'Tavy' still related to us guys!)

So it was with no scorn that I too wore a leek on the 1<sup>st</sup> of March - a miniature one fashioned from green and white ribbon - and I reflected on past celebrations in my schooldays. In Welsh schools it was the day for 'eisteddfodau' (literally meaning seated gatherings) - a day of intense competition in music, poetry and much else. The competition was between individuals and also between the 'houses' to which all our wise teachers had appointed us. I belonged to the house of 'Garmon' - a Welsh hero in antiquity. The other houses were 'Llyr' and 'Gwynedd' - the latter being the name of the last royal Welsh principedom, which disappeared in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The rivalry was intense and carried on throughout the year, especially on the football field. However, for St. David's Day, the differences of opinion were fairly polite.

Soon after the spring term commenced the preparations for the eisteddfod began. Each 'house' organized its choirs and choral speaking groups and started rehearsing. Individuals practised their songs and learned the recitation pieces while those of us who neither sang nor played the violin got on with making the pipe rack or other useful article that had been selected for the woodworking competition or, for the girls, that matching set of facecloths in needlework. All the while the aspiring poets would be imploring inspiration. These were the followers in the Bardic tradition and, for the composer of the winning poem, the greatest honour in the eisteddfod awaited - the churning of the bard - being acclaimed and seated in a great carved oaken chair, with a sheathed sword overhead, while the headmaster intoned, 'A oes heddwch?' (Is there peace?). I never composed the winning verse, but I came close to unsheathing the sword through ignorance of the ceremony. To this day, I wonder what would have happened if I had succeeded! (David Brown)

**Civil War Heroes** In speaking of the American Civil War, most of us would not consider the Welsh as a component, yet recent research has shown that thousands of the men in Lincoln's Union army originated from Wales. Some companies were made up entirely of Welshmen - and some spoke only Welsh. Records of one company reveal 150 Welshmen.

Dr. Jerry Hunter, a teacher at the University of Bangor, calls Wales his 'adopted country'. In the 1980's he was studying the Welsh language and, to his amazement, discovered an account of the American Civil War written entirely in Welsh. This inspired him to do more research and he found information indicating that there had been up to 9,000 people of Welsh origin in that war. He has made a three-part documentary series currently being shown on the Welsh TV, Channel S4C.

Diaries, letters and poems were the clues Hunter had to work with. They came from 400 different people: most of whom were literate and supplied news to Welsh newspapers both in the U.S. and in Wales. A person called Ifan Davis wrote about Kentucky, describing 3,000 dying men on each side. He describes horses without riders, soldiers without arms, the roaring of cannons over his head, bullets falling at his feet, and the moaning of the wounded.

The Welsh soldiers had come mostly from Pennsylvania and Ohio (coal and iron mines), from Vermont (slate quarries), from Wisconsin and New York: some were as young as 14 years old. All these men were opposed to slavery. The Rev. Erasmus Jones, chaplain to the 21<sup>st</sup> U.S. Coloured Infantry, was a strong abolitionist.

A number of these men became famous: John Rowlands from Denbighshire was one of the fighters who later changed his name to Henry Morton Stanley and was the explorer who met the famous Dr. Livingstone in Africa: Colonel William Powell who had come to the U.S. as a child with his parents was an ironworker in Ohio before joining the army and led a cavalry regiment in the hills of West Virginia in guerrilla warfare and, at the end of the war, was promoted to Brigadier-General! (Gwyn Solomon)

**Film Remakes Made in Wales** Readers will recall that efforts are being made to establish new film studios in Wales to rival Hollywood. One of the promoters is Richard Attenborough who has high hopes for the venture. One wonders the kind of re-makes that these studios could contemplate - to ensure a typically Welsh flavour and to combine that with a title having local impact and a tinge of good humour! What about these for starters on our cinema billboards?

**The Bridge on the River Wye   The King and Dai   Look Back in Bangor   From Risca With Love   Trefforest Gump  
Dai Hard   The Wizard of Oswestry   Cool Hand Look-you   The Magnificent Severn   Dye Another Dai   Austin Powys  
Lawrence of Llandybie   Dirty Llanharry   Independence Dai   The Eagle Has Llandudno   Seven Broads from Seven Sisters**

These offer a fair choice of titles! Does anyone else have an idea? Let your minds wander when next you see an advertised flick!

**The Holly (Celyn) Coracle** As you may know, the coracle is a wickerwork framed boat covered with watertight material, used on Welsh and Irish rivers. The Welshman who took credit for successfully building one of these hazardous fishing craft from holly twigs - was a man named Williams. Some may know him as William Williams, Punt-y-celyn!

## May Newsletter Issue - 2004

### Calgary Welsh Society

**75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary WNGGA** The Welsh National Gymanfa Ganu Association (to which our Society belongs) celebrates its 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary at the North American Festival of Wales 2004, scheduled to be held in Buffalo NY, September 2 - 5 next! The Association's 'Hwyl' newsletter invites all of us to celebrate the past, present and future of our Welsh heritage at the largest annual Welsh gathering in North America. The event traces its origins back to 1929, when thousands from across North America met at Niagara Falls to hold a Welsh reunion over Labour Day weekend. The central focus was a Gymanfa Ganu (Singing Festival) held on Goat Island, a wooded isle situated in the middle of the river above the world famous Niagara Falls. The event became an annual occurrence, prompting the foundation of the present Association. In 1979, the National Gymanfa Ganu was held again on Goat Island to mark its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary with the laying of a plaque. Now in its 75<sup>th</sup> year of Welsh tradition and heritage, the North American Festival of Wales returns to where it all began, with festival headquarters in nearby Buffalo. A special commemorative ceremony will be held during the festival at that same wooded isle above the falls.

There will be an abundance of Welsh culture to enjoy and explore during this four-day celebration of traditional and contemporary Wales. The entertainment will include harpist *Robin Huw Bowen* and folk music favourites *Crasdant* renowned for their mix of humour, high energy dancing and brilliant musicianship. The celebrated *Toronto Welsh Male Voice Choir* will also be appearing. This choir of 50 voices recently returned from a highly successful tour of Wales.

Festival competitions will range from literary writing, recitation, hymn singing, vocal and instrumental performances in separate categories for different ages, groups and semi-professionals. Speakers from Wales and North America will explore topics on historical and contemporary Wales and Welsh-American interests in a seminar series. During the festival there will be a variety of child and youth activities. A Welsh marketplace will provide an opportunity to purchase Welsh books, products and souvenirs and gain information about the many Welsh organizations across North America.

For NAFOW information and contacts see the festival website at [www.nafow.org](http://www.nafow.org) or write to the International Headquarters at PO Box 215, Hartland MI 48353-0215. Phone numbers are 1-800-477-0090 & 1-810-632-7850 - or contact [wngga@comcast.net](mailto:wngga@comcast.net)

**The Cockerel Crows** The European 2004 Six Nations rugby tournament saw Wales climb up the ladder (a bit) - achieving two wins (against Scotland and Italy) and 3 losses (England, Ireland and France). England, the 2003 World Champs, lost 2 matches (Ireland and France) and finished tied for second place with Ireland. Scotland had a disappointing year, finishing last - and Italy's only win happened against the luckless Scots! France beat all - and deservedly won the championship!

In June a Welsh XV will tour Argentina and South Africa. We'll watch with interest; they could beat both - on a good day!

**Farewell Stradey** Llanelli R.F.C. has plans to leave its Stradey Park spiritual home for a new purpose built stadium. The move is certain to raise emotions as it will end a century of rugby at the famous ground that first played host to the 'Scarlets' back in 1904. Since then the ground has become one of the most famous and passionate club venues in world rugby, witnessing historic club victories over the All Blacks in 1957 and 1972 and then the Wallabies in 1992. A new stadium is planned for a town site in conjunction with Carmarthen County Council by the 2007 season. A name for the stadium has yet to be agreed! I recall that the 4 goalposts at the ground featured miniature 'sospans' atop each one. It's certain they'll reappear at the new arena!

**Saints Alive - Welsh Whisky** A news item from the April issue of the Central New Brunswick Welsh Society newsletter stated that the Principality had re-established its whisky heritage and launched a new product to mark St. David's Day. *Penderyn*, made in the village of the same name, is the first new whisky from Wales since the last distillery closed some 100 years ago. Just 6,000 bottles have been produced using natural local water. It was matured in bourbon casks and finished in rare Madeira barrels. Distilled in a single still it will retail for \$50.00. For information check [www.welshwhisky.co.uk](http://www.welshwhisky.co.uk)

**David Thompson Country** Driving north on Highway #2 you will see a notice just outside Calgary city limits that proudly says, 'You are entering David Thompson Country'. Few realize, it would appear, that David Thompson was Welsh - born in Westminster (London) of Welsh parentage. His given name was Dafydd ap Thomas (David, Son of Thomas) and he arrived in Canada in his youth, initially working in the fur trade. In the words of the prestigious National Geographic magazine, this 'Son of Thomas' became the greatest explorer and mapmaker in North America. Lewis and Clark used his maps when their expedition reached the North West United States - for Thompson had covered and accurately charted that territory some years before them! Thompson's maps were even used in Canada until the early 1900's - so accurate were they!

The United States recognizes the achievements of Lewis and Clark and their famed expedition by celebrating its 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year. Yet, in Canada, it would appear that Parks Canada, in its wisdom, does not care about David Thompson's achievements or the tribute to the early fur trade commemorated at the Rocky Mountain House 'Interpretive Centre'. Controversy reigns in Rocky Mountain House concerning Parks Canada's attitude towards the maintenance of this historic site, located at the fort! As Canadian/Welsh we need to remind the 'powers that be', we take strong exception to Parks Canada's posture! Our Dave Matthews has been very active in following up on this matter! Support this cause by writing your MP, your MLA - even the PM!

**Talking of Politicians** Perhaps Jean Chretien and Paul Martin should be thankful that Aneurin (Nye) Bevan did not survive to enter Canadian politics. Nye once said of British PM Anthony Eden, at the time of the Suez crisis: 'If he knew, he's too wicked to be prime minister and, if he didn't know, he's too stupid to be one!' If the Homburg fits, eh you guys?

## May Newsletter Issue - 2004

### Calgary Welsh Society

**The B & W Minstrel Show** How many of you remember the George Mitchell song and dance spectacular on BBC TV that beat Fred Astaire and the Kirov Ballet to win the 'Golden Rose' for best television show in the World at the first Montreux Festival in 1961? The programme dominated UK television variety for two decades and regularly attracted audiences of 15 million! The principal singers were Dai Francis, Tony Mercer and John Boulter. Sadly, Dai Francis died last year! Dai was born in Swansea and will be best remembered for his renditions of Al Jolson on that Minstrel show. His father was also a music hall performer who at one time knew more than 200 Dixieland songs. His singing abilities rubbed off on young Dai (aka David) and before he was ten would 'black up' with burnt cork to sing at local jazz band processions at village carnivals.

For a while Dai worked at nightclubs before joining the Mitchell Singers as a member of the chorus. He quickly rose to soloist by 1957 when the BBC staged the first Black and White Minstrel Show. Dai Francis went on to appear in every Minstrel Show throughout its 21-year TV run. It was axed in 1978 on the grounds that the 'blacking up', a long tradition in the theatre, was racially offensive. Dai continued to do summer shows, make provincial tours and do Jolson impressions. Great music, 'Mammy'!

**At the Jazz Band Parade** They called them, Jazz Bands - but they were not jazz musicians really, in the traditional sense; band members played the 'Kazoo' (if that is the right word) - a modification of the old comb and paper 'instrument' that kids enjoyed humming-through back in the 'thirties'. Each 'Mardi Gras' style uniformed band would be led by an imposing drum-major in true military manner who would also direct his platoon of music making marchers through a host of marching and counter marching routines. These marching bands were popular in the decade or so that preceded WW2 and certainly became a feature of fund-raising carnivals and carnival parades in the Swansea Valley! The annual Pontardawe carnival was in support of the local cricket and rugby club and attracted some ten to fifteen bands from within the valley area and beyond.

The 'Ponty' parade would start from a location close to my grandparents' home and would 'play' and wend its way on that street overlooking the LMS railway track and the River Tawe (rust riddled from the effluent of the local tin-plate plants): pass through the town and proceed back along the other side of the valley to end up at the cricket and rugby club ground. The ground, the parade terminal point, would also be visible from my original vantage point. The route length and local interest compared with our Stampede Parade; it attracted all the locals and visitors, who would line the entire procession route! At the ground, marching competitions would then be held and prizes awarded to the best 'drilled', the best dressed and the most amusing band ensembles!

In retrospect, the very 'regimental' abilities of the marching groups, seen on these parades at that particular time, undoubtedly reflected the uneasiness felt about European politics and the token attempts made to provide a modicum of military training for young British males. The Territorial Army existed (The Terriers) and many young men joined and 'enjoyed' weekend training camps. Hence the interest in marching and the competence of the drill routines featured in those 'Jazz Band' programmes!

**Have You Heard of Wenglish** According to author John Edwards, 'Wenglish' is the spoken 'identification tag' for people in the valley communities north of Newport, Cardiff, Bridgend and Swansea. It is a remarkable blend of residual Welsh and local patterns of English - lingos with lilt all their own! Generally, such folk would not be Welsh speaking or be living in an essentially Welsh speaking environment. They would probably be Anglo-Welsh with an authentic voice or a distinctive accent reflecting something of a localized social heritage. Having encountered it in a couple of areas of West Glamorgan (and East Carmarthenshire) - it is an ugly uncultured 'sing-song' accent, inundated with local slang, extensively ungrammatical and bawdy! It can vary markedly from one end of a town to the other - and that distance need not be more than a couple of miles! A local comedienne, Maudie Edwards, that I recall, used this kind of local dialect extensively in her BBC radio programmes. Others have described it variously as, 'pit prattle', 'chapel chatter', 'garden wall gossip', 'rugby field ranting', the 'palaver of the playground' and the language of those locals who can 'talk the hind legs off a dragon!'

Returning to live in his home town after many years of exile in North Wales and the West of England, John Edwards found that the speech patterns and rhythms of his boyhood - so far from being dead and buried, were alive and flourishing! His book, '*Talk Tidy*' (The art of speaking Wenglish), is printed in Wales by D.Brown & Sons Ltd., Bridgend, Mid Glamorgan. Read it; it can bring back many amusing (or hysterical) memories! '*Speak Proper, Mun*' - could have been an equally good title, methinks!

**CWS Newsletter Distribution** Members and friends are reminded that 'hard copies' will henceforth be sent by mail (Canada Post, that is) **ONLY** to those **WITHOUT INTERNET ACCESS** or have **EXPRESSED PARTICULAR PREFERENCE** for such delivery. Newsletters will be posted regularly on our website as soon as prepared! However, should there be any change necessary to suit your individual convenience - please advise the Ed., at the earliest!

**Don't Forget to Shop at these Interesting Stores - Generous Discounts are Available to CWS Members in Good Standing!**

**GOOD TASTE OF BRITAIN (1995) Ltd.**  
Eau Claire Market, Downtown Calgary

**WHO'S WHO IN THE ZOO**  
Int. Airport: Eau Claire: South Centre

**THE NEXT NEWSLETTER WILL BE PUBLISHED AHEAD OF ANY PLANNED SUMMER ACTIVITIES. DA BO!**