



## September Newsletter Issue – 2004 Calgary Welsh Society



### Cymdeithas Gymreig Calgary

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**Comments/Contributions: E-mail to Roly Thomas at [betrol@sprint.ca](mailto:betrol@sprint.ca) or Phone (403) 246-5093 or Post to 134 Country Hills Gardens NW, Calgary, AB.T3K 5G2. OUR Website is: [www.calgarywelshsociety.com](http://www.calgarywelshsociety.com) - PLEASE LOOK IT UP!**

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Gee, that was quick, another summer gone by in a flash! We hope yours was a good one and that the body-batteries are now fully re-charged to again combat the seasonal challenges that probably lie ahead of us - autumn and winter that is! Our two summer events comprising the Pot Luck Picnic at Lake Bonavista (on July 25) and our support of the 62<sup>nd</sup> Ponoka Gymanfa (August 08) were both well attended and thoroughly enjoyed! A big thanks to Ross and Pam Hicks for arranging use of their community facilities for a picnic that was favoured by appropriately warm and sunny weather - and to the Ponoka Welsh Society who again did such a splendid job of arranging and hosting what has become a 'traditional' Alberta event!

**Our NEXT Social Event** Please note a **POEM & PINTS night is FIRMLY FIXED for SATURDAY, OCTOBER 16<sup>th</sup>**.  
(Note this date differs from the announcement made in the June/July newsletter)

The venue should be familiar to most, the **IRISH CULTURAL CENTRE at 6452 - 35<sup>th</sup> AVENUE NW**. Snack foods will be provided: the bar has a good choice of whistle wetting beers: and the previously mishandled Wayne Davies Welsh film (with English audio) will be resurrected. A Welsh quiz will also be featured to challenge your wit and wisdom - so bring along a pen or pencil! **A charge of \$10 per head will cover food and hall rental charges!** There is convenient free parking!

**Welsh 'helped build' Stonehenge** Archaeologists believe they have finally discovered the elusive Britons who dragged the Stonehenge 'bluestones' more than 100 miles to their final resting place on Salisbury Plain. Tests on tooth enamel of Bronze Age skeletons from a 4,300-year-old Boscombe Down grave revealed that they were almost certainly born in West Wales close to where the bluestones originated in the Preseli hills of Pembrokeshire. The grave was unusual as it contained the remains of seven people - three children, a teenager and three men. Archaeologists are calling them the 'Boscombe Bowmen' because of the flint arrowheads also found in the grave! In medieval times people believed the stones could only have been transported to Stonehenge by Merlin, the wizard!

Informed opinion suggested the skulls, because they were so similar, might be related. As such, they could have all worked on this monumental task as one family! Additional tests by British Geological Survey scientists on the teeth showed they were from a location where the rocks were radioactive - pinpointing either the Lake District or Wales. As enamel forms on children's teeth, it apparently locks in evidence of where they grew up. This clearly indicated the west-Wales association!

**Now a Druid wants it returned** Nothing is sacred in this world of ours! The Arch-druid of Wales has called for England's most famous landmark to be relocated in Wales. In a recent letter to *The Telegraph* the 'guru' of the Gorsedd (Bardic Throne) Dr. Robyn Lewis, highlighted the significance of the Stonehenge discovery and suggested to the English (since they returned the Stone of Destiny to Scotland - and that it should only be a matter of time for the Elgin Marbles to be returned to Greece) it would be appropriate for the Stonehenge bluestones to be returned to Wales! It is recalled that some enterprising Scots once stole their stone from Westminster Abbey. But these Pembrokeshire bluestones are too heavy for such slight of hand - even by a bunch of Welsh front-row-forwards! To boot, the Arch-druid himself is probably no modern day Hercules and neither does he appear to be particularly cost-conscious; could he have really thought much beyond his nose on the subject of his plea to *The Telegraph* - or upon the 'astronomical' implications of his desire?

The limitations of existing road systems, railways and bridges between Salisbury Plain and the Principality would surely scuttle any serious consideration - even if the majority of Welsh folk cared? One wonders if the Arch-druid is a humourist and that his letter was written in jest? But again, and unbeknown to us mortals, Dr. Lewis may be privy to knowledge about where Merlin hangs his cone-shaped headgear these days! Does he profess some special Arch-druid quality, we wonder? But, we are told, he is no stranger to controversy and favours radical changes to modernize the National Eisteddfod. One Dr. Lewis idea was for transportable 'fake' Gorsedd stones to be moved to each new venue, enabling ceremonies to be held at the festival site. Capping all this, he agreed to the sale of alcoholic drinks at the 'National'! So, could it therefore be a related initiative for the Lewis 'Gorsedd Stones' to also double as cunningly disguised public toilets? The originality of this man, eh?

**The World's Best City** Canadian cities ranked among the best in the world for clean and healthy lifestyles - according to a recent international survey. **The CITY of CALGARY WAS RATED 'THE WORLD'S BEST!'** The survey, conducted by *Mercer Human Resources Consulting*, scored Calgary at 121 points - just above Honolulu with 120. Helsinki and Ottawa followed at 119.5 and 118.5 respectively. It was based on the quality and availability of hospital and medical supplies, hospital services, levels of air pollution, infectious diseases, the efficiency of waste removal and sewage systems, water potability and exposure to harmful animals and insects! All surveyed Canadian cities appeared in the 'TOP 20' ranking - including Montreal and Vancouver (both) ranked at #9 (116 points) and Toronto at #18 (with 115 points)!

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US cities, in the 'Top 20' behind Honolulu, included Minneapolis (5<sup>th</sup> - 117 points), Boston/Lexington/Pittsburgh and Portland (also rated 9<sup>th</sup> with 116 points). Atlanta was the lowest scoring city in North America - rating at #75 with 95 points.

London (UK), was rated 59<sup>th</sup> (106 points) with Milan, Rome and Lisbon at joint 69<sup>th</sup> (99 points). Athens was the very worst of the western European bunch, ranking 120<sup>th</sup> with 73 points, due to high pollution level! Oslo, Stockholm, Zurich, Bern, Geneva and Nuremberg all ranked in the top 20! Apparently no Welsh city appeared in this study - not even Cardiff!

Well-deserved plaudits are extended to our mayor, aldermen and city staff - all over many years - on this achievement! Your Ed. has often said that it is great to visit elsewhere and the old country - but always **so nice to return home** to Calgary!

**The WorldWideWelsh Website** This Website is located in Cardiff and offers a wealth of information, comments, photos, sporting and other news, topical competitions and much more - specifically designed for expatriates wishing to maintain ties with the Principality. It already has a worldwide coverage of Welsh people and societies - ranging across Australia (116 registered members), the USA (100), Europe (73), Canada (50), New Zealand (34), Africa (18) and Asia (11). A number of us from Calgary have contributed to it while we have also advised the Website about other active Canadian-Welsh associations. Your usual search engine will have no difficulty in finding it for you. Give it a try!

**South Wales transport concerns** South Wales attempts to become a booming European region are being hampered by outdated motorway systems - so one of the country's top transport experts (Prof. Garel Rhys of UC Cardiff) advises! While Cardiff has been transformed into a European capital, it appears to be living on borrowed time because of chronic infrastructure under-investment. It must surely be time for 'the powers that be' to focus on realities - not on unproductive fantasies as described in the 'druicidal' bluestones bit! (Dr. Lewis, do you feel you are being picked on?)

**Lawrence of Arabia and Tremadoc** Reading Michael Asher's biography of T.E. Lawrence became a fascinating exercise that revealed so many unrealized details about the man, his origins and his life. A couple of these bits of information your Ed. could relate to - and happily, in a far less complex or adventurous lifestyle!

Lawrence took his mother's surname since she never married his father. The father was a wealthy man and a member of the landed gentry who had been domiciled in Ireland over very many years. His parents chose to leave Ireland, the family estate (and the father's legal wife) and first settled in Tremadoc, on the Llyn peninsula. Lawrence was born there in 1888.

William Alexander Madoc built Tremadoc (then a new town) on some 2,000 acres of reclaimed land in the first decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The town had a market square, a town hall, broad tree-lined streets, a *St. Mary's Church* and a *Penniel Chapel* and some attractive private homes! One of these became the Lawrence family's, on Church Street. It is now well preserved as the *Snowden Lodge* - north Wales's premier hostel for visitors with mountain climbing and other strenuous outdoor interests. The former living room in this edifice is the *Café Lawrence* - specializing in light lunches and sandwich fare!

In the early 1890's the family moved south, to Fawley in Hampshire - in the days when the village was a secluded one on the west shore of Southampton Water. It was also in the New Forest, Henry VIII's one-time hunting grounds! As it happens, your Ed. also lived there before moving to Canada! Many changes had occurred since Henry's era and even Lawrence's early days in the village. The Lawrence home survives to this day, just next-door to Fawley Church - where, incidentally, the Ed's two daughters were christened. Known as *Copthorne House*, it is a well-maintained property retained as the refinery manager's home - since a large Exxon refining complex and tanker terminal now dominates that one time truly rural area!

Coincidentally, when Col. Lawrence left the army (after WW1) he joined the RAF as a lowly Aircraftsman and became stationed just down the road from Fawley at Calshot Point RAF station. (Calshot Point would have also been visible from his *Copthorne House* home.) In the 1930's the Calshot station was the base for the *Schneider Trophy* seaplanes that ultimately led to the design of the '*Spitfire*'. Even later, during the early 1960's, two *Princess* flying boats were housed at Calshot and a third at Cowes, on the Isle of Wight. These massive Saunders-Roe 'Jumbo Ducks' had been destined for transatlantic air traffic between Southampton Water and the Great Lakes. None ever flew; engine and gearbox technology failed to match their need for 10 coupled turbo-prop units. They were finally sold for scrap, ending a very romantic era in UK aircraft design!

The Lawrence family only lived in Fawley for a few years. Their travels finally ended in Oxford - where Lawrence later became an Oxford scholar. Due to his place of birth he was admitted to the St. John's campus - a college generally earmarked for Welsh students! So, there you go, another snippet of the '*Lawrence of Arabia*' story - plus a little bit extra!

**Drinking ban for Cwmbran** The town centre is to become the first within the Gwent police jurisdiction to be designated a non-drinking zone in an effort to cut down on local anti-social behaviour! It would be fair to ask why drinking is allowed on the streets of any city or town centre, Welsh or otherwise, anyway? The practice, if only abused by the ever-present over-indulging few, inevitably conveys an image that reflects unfairly upon an entire community - rather than upon the irresponsible minority!

In the old days when Welsh pubs were closed on Sundays more drunks would be seen that night than any other one - even when Fridays were payday and pay packets had to contain real hard cash! Now it would appear that this 'guilty minority' element is even more evident - every day and all day - with the expression 'no rest for the wicked' becoming an unfortunate true-ism! Many communities seem to have a similar problem these days - often in association with a major sporting occasion

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- Like ice hockey 'play-off' games and the *Red Mile* - or rugby international matches and the streets outside Cardiff Arms Park/Millennium Stadium - to mention only a couple of familiar sports related venues. There is no truth in a rumour that Cwmbran is to be renamed Cwmbrain because of the initiative - or that the rumour was started by *BrAIns*, the Cardiff brewer!

**Generalissimo Coslett** How many remember the one-time imitation Fidel Castro from Carmarthenshire? Back in 1968, a front-page picture and 'tongue-in-cheek' feature-article appeared in the popular '*Picture Post*' weekly UK magazine - about a fellow who looked like Fidel, dressed like Fidel (even with ammunition bandoleer) - but wasn't really Fidel! Dennis Coslett, a misguided sheep farmer from near Llandilo, became the self-styled 'Commandant' of the *Free Wales Army*. Quite recently the poor chap 'passed on' without ever achieving the credibility or the fame of the 14<sup>th</sup> century patriot, Owain Glyndwr! Coslett and nine members of his militant 'flock' were taken to court in 1969 for offences that ranged from membership of a paramilitary organisation to that of handling illegal firearms! Your Ed. saw this magazine issue when living in the US and where, at the same time, the only piece of music heard on the car-radio happened to be that of Mary Hopkin's, 'Those were the days!' Strange that these two events relating to two neighbouring south Wales folk (but of distinctly different 'talents') should have achieved such newsworthy status at that time!

The '*Post*' aptly coined the 'Dai R.A.' term for the ridiculous Coslett image! So, aspiring separation zealots should take note, 'Don't talk to a bunch of sheep when running up and down a mountainside (or elsewhere) on pseudo-military exercises - for you could end up becoming complete Asses!' If you can hear me, wherever you may be - isn't that the truth, Dennis?

**Lie in the Dark and Listen** This is the name of a book, written by Welshman Ken Rees, commemorating the anniversary of *The Great Escape* from Stalag Luft III in 1944. At the age of 21 Rees piloted a Wellington bomber and was shot down while on a mission over Norway in 1942. He survived, was taken prisoner and became a PoW. Prior to this he had successfully completed nearly sixty bombing missions over northern Europe and the Mediterranean. He now lives in Anglesey close to an RAF base. He probably still enjoys the screech of planes (but jets this time) over his home!

Ken Rees had first-hand knowledge of the preparations for the mass escape and believed the film made in 1963 (with notable actors like Steve McQueen, Richard Attenborough and James Garner) accurately portrayed life in the camp - except in one major way, all the American prisoners who dominated the film had been moved to another camp before 'the escape' took place. The character played by McQueen is loosely based on Pilot Officer Rees who had established a reputation for continually goading the German guards because of his outrage on learning that his pilot brother-in-law had been machine-gunned to death by a circling German fighter plane as he floated earthwards after baling out of his blazing *Hurricane*. He frequently ended up in the 'cooler' (the punishment block) for his efforts - as McQueen's character did!

When it came to putting a tunnelling team together Rees was chosen because, being a Welshman, his fellow prisoners assumed he had (coal) mining experience. In letters home to his mother he let her know that he was trying to tunnel out of the camp - by writing to her in Welsh and suggesting after the war he would consider applying for a job at the local colliery. It was one coded message the German censors (fortunately) failed to pick up!

Before the 'Great Escape' got under way, some 100 unsuccessful tunnels had been started at the camp and numerous foiled escape attempts made - including one in which a group of prisoners were coolly marched out of the front gates guarded by fellow PoWs in immaculate forged German uniforms. Roger Bushell, the character played by Attenborough, was well portrayed in the film. A brilliant barrister in real life, he was chosen to head the 'X Operation' because of his considerable skill in putting the 'frighteners' on the more corruptible German guards who had been bribed with coffee and chocolate to provide vital equipment for the escapers. Rees recalls seeing these unfortunates leaving Bushell's hut 'shaking like leaves'!

For Rees, the long hours of tunnelling in 'Harry', the longest of three tunnels (and the only successful one) became occupational therapy to alleviate boredom and hunger through one of the coldest winters of the century. He mentioned that the entire tunnel was lit by electricity due to the enterprise of PoWs who had somehow stolen two huge drums of cable!

The 'Great Escape' took place on the night of March 24<sup>th</sup> 1944. A total of 76 men escaped before a German perimeter guard accidentally stumbled upon an escapee as he was exiting the tunnel. The operation was abandoned at 4.30 a.m. - just before it became Ken Rees's turn to climb the ladder and attempt his own exit. He was the last to clamber back into the hut before the German guards arrived there! 73 men were recaptured - and, as is well known, the SS and Gestapo executed 50 of them in cold blood on the direct instruction of the crazed German dictator, Hitler!

In Canada, 'Lie in the Dark and Listen' should be available through the Indigo/Chapters/Coles book-selling group - or from a branch of the Calgary Public Library. If you are familiar with the film, it should greatly add to its impact! In the UK, it can be obtained from *Telegraph Books Direct* at a cost of 16.99 pounds sterling - plus the inevitable p&p!

**Slippery fish found** Police, who let a 3-metre sturgeon slip through their fingers following its attempted illegal sale, have netted it again! Fisherman Robert Davies caught a 120-Kg monster off the south Wales coast and, in keeping with tradition, loyally offered it to the Queen. However, Buckingham Palace advised Mr. Davies (in the politest monarchical terms) what he could do with it - to dispose of it as he saw fit! Our enterprising fisherman did just that, heading down to Plymouth so as to auction the roe laden ocean beast. Did anyone know that a sturgeon caught in British waters is protected as an endangered species? Alas, Robert Davies did not - so he, poor chap, is now on the proverbial 'hook' himself!

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**Northwest Passage** Way back in 1631 a little known Welsh born explorer, Thomas James, spent the best part of a couple of years searching for the elusive Northwest Passage that was supposed to lead European merchants to the wealth and treasures of the exotic East. Captain Thomas James, commissioned by the Bristol Society of Merchant Venturers, undertook the task after which he published a detailed narrative of his hazardous voyage fraught with navigational uncertainties, treacherous Arctic ice and extremes of weather. His work was largely dismissed in the nineteenth century despite previously being highly regarded in surveys of exploration and by many scholars - including the scientist Robert Boyle and poet Samuel Coleridge. If James was not later recognized as an explorer of high calibre - even if he did fail in his basic quest - he showed that he was an able navigator and a leader, a perceptive scientific observer and a competent author!

Long time Society member Wayne Davies believes that Thomas James's thrilling tale of adventure should occupy a more prominent place in the study of exploration, literature and history - not only in Canada but also in James's native homeland.

Based on extensive research, an evaluation was made of Captain Thomas James's work - providing a new perspective on the many problems faced by James and his crew during their challenging voyage of discovery! ***Writing Geographical Exploration – Thomas James and the Northwest Passage, 1631 – 33*** is a recent book by Prof. Davies, published by the University of Calgary Press - from which source it can also be purchased.

**Spirit of the times** A couple of UK polls recently tried to find the book that best summed up the individual 'essences' of the three predominant cultures within the land. They produced interesting (and perhaps revealing) images! To describe the essence of 'Englishness', two books - George Orwell's ***1984*** and Bill Bryson's ***Notes from a Small Island*** - were chosen. In the **BBC 4 Today** programme, listeners voted for Orwell's ***1984*** - a vision describing a totalitarian self image. The identical poll by ***World Book Day*** chose the Bryson impression - a relentless satire (by an American author) that poked fun at the English 'as small-minded bores, obsessed by rules and ritual'! From such choices it could be assumed that the English penchant for self-loathing remains very much alive - or could it be a favourable attribute - that they exhibited a good sense of humour and a tendency to not take them-selves too seriously? (Isn't that the case, Mrs. Thomas?)

For the Celtic fringe a similar exercise proved more upbeat. In the ***World Book Day*** poll, the Scots voted for ***Me and Ma Girl*** by Des Dillon, an entertaining account of the author's childhood in Scotland! Despite their unmatched universal claims to fame - golf, curling and Scotch Whiskey (of course) - they obviously remain surprisingly modest at the present time!

However, Welsh poll participants voted for ***Work, Sex and Rugby*** (a first novel by Lewis Davies) as their spirit-of-the-times image. The book is described as a 'four-day odyssey through the pubs, bedrooms and building sites of Wales'! But, is it possible that this could also convey something of a wishful thinking penchant toward current realities? Why wasn't it a seven-day odyssey, we wonder? But wait, are 'The Lost Three Days' going to be a more revealing sequel by this author?

**A Welshman in Athens** David Davies dug deep to claim a second swimming bronze medal for Britain in the men's 1500m 'Freestyle' in the recent Athens Olympics. The 19-year-old Welshman smashed both the previous British and European records in doing so - while also knocking a massive 12 seconds off his personal best in the battle for the bronze. Only three swimmers have ever gone faster over the gruelling distance. Congratulations to David on his success!

**'Valleywood' work to start** Work on the first phase of a billion dollar world-class film studio in south Wales is to begin in a matter of weeks (September 04). It will include five silent stages, an outdoor street set and film production facilities. The site is at Llanilid near Llantrisant (Vale of Glamorgan) with the developer already in the application process for the next building phase, a studio village and sound studios. The planned 'first phase' opening is in early 2005. Dragon International, chaired by (Lord) Richard Attenborough, indicated the new facilities would be well placed to bring hundreds of jobs to the area. The present development alone is likely to involve in excess of 1,700 people!

**Wales features in U.S. Park** Wales has been chosen as one of 10 cultures to be featured in a new American theme park in a bid to rival Disney World! ***Utopia World Villages*** is being planned for Preston, Connecticut - and built as an all-weather development because of the area's unreliable climate! The theme park will also feature re-creations of cultures from America, England, Scotland, Ireland, Venice, German and Swiss Alpine villages plus two others yet to be determined. Interestingly, performing artists would speak the languages of the countries they represented with the sites also serving as backdrops for film productions. The individual cultural sites will be more authentic than Epcot in Florida's Disney World. The developers consider the location to be perfectly placed - because some 18 million children live within a 600-mile radius of it. Further, that area of the country already attracts 25 million visitors annually!

**Don't forget to shop at these interesting stores. Generous discounts available to all 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 WINTER ACTIVITIES. NOTE that the SOCIETY CHRISTMAS DINNER is PROVISIONALLY booked at FORT CALGARY, SUNDAY DEC. 5<sup>th</sup>!**

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