



Fall NewsLetter Issue - 2005 Calgary Welsh Society



Cymdeithas Gymreig Calgary

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ELIZABETH HOWELLS ELSON The Society mourns the untimely passing of one of its staunchest members! Liz, the cherished wife of Dave and the beloved mother of Nicky and Tim, died tragically in a rafting accident on the Bow River on August 5th last. Over many years she had been active within our Society - with which she was able to combine so many other interests and devotions that contributed to living life to the fullest. Born in Carmarthen in 1947, Liz came to Canada in 1974 where she and Dave worked and raised a family. Latterly they chose to call Calgary home - for the enjoyment of a well-earned retirement! Liz will be missed by all who were privileged to know her - always the happiest of persons and renowned for her generous, supportive and dedicated nature. Our heartfelt sympathies are extended to Dave and the children!

LIZ PEARCE HONOURED Those attending the recent well-supported *Calgary Highland Games* at Shouldice Athletic Park on September 3rd would have been impressed by the C.H.G. Association's tribute to Liz! A half-page appreciation, in the official programme, drew attention to a decade of tireless involvement by her in the role of treasurer - a fact that greatly contributed to the progressive success of the *Calgary Highland Games* during those years! In her name, a new annual competition was introduced this year - the *Liz Pierce Memorial Kilted Dash* - where runners were obliged to wear the kilt in an open race without age limit or imposed fee. The *Calgary United Scottish Games Association* undertook to donate \$5 to the Canadian Cancer Society for every competitor - in an appreciative gesture to Liz's memory!

Do WE talk about it - Nah! Ireland may claim to be the ancestral home of more than a dozen US presidents - but very little has ever been mentioned about the significant Welsh contribution to all walks of American life! In a letter to *The Mirror*, Sid Hill of Dowlais, Glamorgan, wrote that the facts of the matter were very noteworthy. How many of us realized that a significant twenty percent of the Pilgrim Fathers were from Wales - as was the captain of the *Mayflower*; or that fifty percent of the signatories to the *Declaration of Independence* were Welsh (or of Welsh descent) - as were no fewer than 9 U.S. Presidents? Further, it was a fact that the *American War of Independence* had been partly financed by industrialist Robert Morris (the name recalled in the New Jersey township of Morristown): that Pennsylvania had been founded by William Penn and Rhode Island by a Roger Williams - all Welshmen! Yet again, more enterprising Welshmen established Yale, Princeton and John Hopkins universities - and, even more surprising, if you were to venture up the steps inside the Washington Monument (leading to the observation level) about half way up you would come across a stone inscribed by Thomas Jefferson that read, '*Cymru am Byth*' (Wales for Ever)! Jefferson must have been 'one of us' too!
(Story submitted by Margaret Kuyt)

[In two North American capitals, Washington and Ottawa, it appears that chiselled inscriptions in Welsh were popular at one time - in an original form of graffiti, perhaps? We now know about the 'monumental' US one - but was anyone aware that *24 Sussex Drive* has a Welsh name inscribed on its gate pillars - the word '*Gorffwysfa*'? The name literally means 'Resting Place' - an interpretation, it would appear, its prime residents (over far too many years) have obviously taken very much to heart, blast them! The word may also be interpreted as 'Place of Peace' - an understanding not necessarily more dynamic than the first! Your Ed. is grateful to Glenson Jones of the Ottawa Society for confirming this bit of Canadian history - which he embellished by adding that the residence was built in 1866 by Joseph Merrill Currier for his wife, Hannah. Currier was a lumberman, an elected MP at Westminster (UK) - as well as a member of our House of Commons on Parliament Hill!]

- OR EVEN ABOUT 1787 - when A WELSHMAN WAS FIRST TO SET FOOT on a bit of land destined to become our fair city! This fact was disclosed in the September 1st commemorative issue of the *Calgary Herald* - which stated that mapmaker **David Thompson** (with a group of Peigan Indians) spent that winter camped along the Bow River. **Thompson became the first recorded European (and a Taff at that) to visit our area of western Canada!**

Tre Ceri Iron Age Hill-fort Member Dr. Colin Dalton re-visited this site on the Lleyrn Peninsula, Gwynedd, during a recent trip to North Wales. He described this renewed personal experience for our benefit as follows, "During a recent trip back to the mountains of my youth, I went a bit further than normal and travelled down the peninsula to a location that, to me, is much more impressive than Stonehenge - the Iron Age hill-fort of *Tre Ceri* also known as *Castell Gwrtheyrn*. Off the beaten path and at an altitude of 1500 feet the fort is the best preserved (if not the most spectacular) stone

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hill-fort in Britain. The 2.5 hectare site is on a rocky heather-covered plateau made up of some 150 huts that might have supported up to 500 people, surrounded by a massive dry stone rampart - with walls still more than 13 feet high in places!

Locally it is known as the *Town of the Giants* and has strong links to the *Vortigern** and *Arthurian* legends. On the occasion that I went (May 2005), true Snowdonia weather was in play - a lovely sunny day on Anglesey, and low-lying rain clouds about 200 feet from the summit. The cloud made the visit more memorable with the fort appearing magically out of the eerie misty clouds and you could imagine the people of days gone by huddled in their huts, cursing the foul weather. Indeed, when it started to rain, we all huddled in one of the old huts for our lunch!

There are fantastic views from the site; views towards Snowdonia and across Caernarfon Bay to Anglesey and Holyhead Mountain. Across Cardigan Bay to the south you can see the outline of Mynydd Preseli (the Preseli Hills) where the bluestones of Stonehenge once came from. To the west lies Ireland, where you can see the Wicklow Hills across the Irish Sea (on a good day, obviously!). It is thought the earliest parts of the fort date to the centuries before the Roman invasion of Wales in AD 78 and that the fort was used until the fourth century. A full street plan of the Roman town has been revealed under the heather, complete with terraced enclosures, probably used for cultivation. A map of the fort is displayed at each of the five entrances where five gates guard tracks leading down to springs on the hillside. An additional wall on the north slope is the most accessible one. The main walls are 13 feet high - betraying considerable Roman influence. However, they are not as strong as common Roman walls - they could stand against brigands or attacks by local tribes but not the Roman army."

Colin added a footnote suggesting the location is well worth a visit - with the easiest approach being by a path starting halfway along the minor Llithfaen/Llanaelhaearn (B4417) road, one mile southwest of Llanaelhaearn. Commencing the trek at the signpost to the right of that road, passing the St. Aelbaiarn's Well and Uwchlaw'rffynon farmstead until, after 3-quarters of a mile, you see a sign-posted kissing-gate. After crossing a level plateau, the track winds steeply upwards between two low tumbled walls (keeping right at the fork) until reaching the fort walls. It is a short but steady climb of about 900 feet from the road level. The path enters the enclosure at the southwest entrance, where there are traces of bastions on either side.

* For those unfamiliar with the name (as your Ed. was) *Vortigern* was the old English king who got the Jutes into Britain to help fight the Picts in A.D. 449 - beginning the Anglo-Saxon conquest of England. Later *Vortigern* fought with Hengist, the Jute leader whose victory led to the founding of the kingdom of Kent. Although uncertain in fact, he may also have married Rowena, Hengist's daughter!

Our Summer Events Programme - Now a Memory

Our August programme quickly came and went in a 2-week period!

First, the Ponoka Gymanfa Ganu (August 14th) was attended by some ten of us from Calgary. However, the attendance was noticeably down this year - a disappointment for the Ponoka Society who again displayed such generous hospitality to their visitors! Members must keep the next gymanfa in mind - remember the **SECOND SUNDAY in AUGUST 2006** - the Ponoka Gymanfa's 64th successive year!

The second event was the August 19th concert by the Cambrian Male Voice Choir from Tonypandy. On the evening a very good turnout of nearly 300 enjoyed an entertaining programme that ranged from well-known traditional songs to works from popular stage musicals and opera. Our contribution to the evening in the person of mezzo-soprano Laura Styler showed we have an accomplished young singer in our midst! Again, her choice of music was well suited to the occasion and was well received by an appreciative audience! We hope that Laura's professional debut with us in Calgary will lead to an even wider recognition of her talent! The outcome of the concert was that we were able to make a donation of \$1,250 to the Cambrian choir's funds - and provide the CWS with the beginnings of a reserve fund to assist with future cultural activities!

The third of our trio of activities was the August 28th picnic at Lake Bonavista. Some thirty members and friends enjoyed a beautifully warm afternoon of conviviality - with food and fun organized by Kathleen Giffin and Kate Coolidge. Tom and Diane Williams, along with Bill and Pam Meadowcroft, directed the afternoon's games interlude. The event also saw the welcome return of the well travelled Keith and Trish Coulson to their Calgary home - and to the ranks of the Society again!

Upgraded Vancouver Website

Our sister society in Lotusland recently advised that its Website www.welshsociety.com has been upgraded to incorporate newsletters as well as other useful society information.

The Vancouver presentation is very similar to our own. It is colourful and well worth a visit! Da iawn Vancouver!

Welsh Air for Sale

A recent BBC news item suggested 'Welsh expatriates missing the sweet smell of home can now buy a bottle of air from the hills (or valleys) of Wales for \$50!' The 59-year-old Cardiffian who dreamt up this scheme believes he is on a very good thing in 'Offering a genuine service for people who want something of Wales that reminds them of their childhood or their homeland.' The 'initiative' stems from support and advice received from *Prime Cymru* - an agency formed in 2001 after the Prince of Wales suggested such a body was needed for 'entrepreneurs aged over 50!' Many observers (regardless of age) probably believe this to be no more than a joke - especially when the prime promoter is quoted as saying, 'There are more Welsh exiles out there around the world than there are in Wales who long for something from the land of their fathers.' Pray advise your Ed. if any of you know of even a single Welsh exile still living in Wales, eh? Regardless, it is doubtful if anyone from the Neath/Swansea areas would wish to be reminded of their early years in South Wales with a 'commemorative bottle of Llandarcy Refinery Stench' - that odious 1940s vintage odour that regularly wafted in and out with the Swansea Bay tide! What, be suckered into paying 50 bucks for a bottle of that memory - not on your life!

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'Glenfiddich' - a Welsh Name For centuries 'dedicated' whisky imbibers believed nothing could have been more Scottish than a wee dram of *Glenfiddich*! For sure, that fine concoction itself will always be appropriately recognized as being truly Scottish in origin - but **NOT** the revered name on the bottle we are now informed!

Following extensive research, a new book by William Oxenham entitled, '*Welsh Origins of Scottish Place-names*' puts a very different perspective on how they originated because Scottish names are some 1,000 to 2,500 years old. They existed when the language spoken across Britain was the forerunner of modern Welsh! Many names survived, though in forms that may be somewhat distorted, to still retain sufficient traces of their earliest ancestry - allowing their original forms and meanings to be discerned with reasonable certainty. In some instances this was easily achieved - as in the name 'Perth' (as pronounced by a native Scot, of course) and meaning precisely as in the Welsh 'perth' - the word for a bush or a hedge!

Explaining other Scottish place names took more language detective work - as in 'Penicuik', a name derived from 'pen y gog' and meaning 'hill of the cuckoo' in the Welsh vernacular! Even *Edinburgh*, the Scottish capital city, is an anglicized version of the Welsh *din Eidyn*, Eidyn's fort - and *Glasgow*, would you believe, simply derived from 'cae glas', green field!

As for 'Glenfiddich', the name had once been *Glyn Fiddich* and *Glen of Guidid* where Guidid was a Pictish king whose name may have derived from 'gwydd' (woods or goose). So, put all that in your Welsh crystal glass ... and sup it with relish!

Forthcoming Attractions Please note the following planned activities on your diary and/or calendar!

Saturday, October 22nd at the Irish Cultural Centre, 6452 - 35 Ave. NW.

**POEMS & PINTS NIGHT - with traditional Welsh eats - \$10 per head!
6.30 for 7.00 pm.**

Cash bar

Free Parking

Among the plans for this evening's entertainment is a film about OWAIN GLYNDWR'S BATTLES. According to our learned President - this is a 50-minute historical film describing how our very first 'Prince of Wales' managed to unite all of Wales under his banner and fought a series of battles on the Welsh borderland to preserve his 'kingdom'. Despite his initial successes, including support from France, he ultimately failed in his efforts and faded into history. This was the last attempt to establish an independent Welsh state until our Tudors took over the English throne. (If you can't beat 'em, join 'em!) The film gives a reconstruction of the battles and of conditions in Wales - a fascinating insight into 'why we finally lost'!

Sunday, December 4th at FORT CALGARY, 750 - 9th Avenue SE.

ANNUAL CHRISTMAS DINNER

Cocktails: 6.30 pm.

Dinner: 7.15 pm.

Paid-up Members \$30.00 each / Non-members \$35.00 each.

Please pay at the door & make cheques payable to the Calgary Welsh Society.

In contacting you, the Phone Committee will also enquire regarding the number planned in your party for the evening - a commitment that, within reason, is expected to be honoured - whether you attend or not!

Cash bar ----- Please make every effort to attend ----- Free Parking

NEW CULTURAL INITIATIVES

For Welsh Speakers - Beth am Ddechrau Cylch Cymreig? Mae sawl un o chwi wedi gofyn a oes diddordeb digonol yn y gymdeithas i ddechrau cylch er mwyn siarad yr hen iaeth? Oes yr ydych am gyfranogi yn y cylch hyn, dywedwch eich meddwl - i Beth Davies (289-0574) - neu Morfudd Jones (243-4925)! Mae'n amser yn iawn! [A number of members have asked if there is sufficient interest within our Society to start a conversational circle of Welsh speakers. If you wish to participate then inform either of the ladies listed. **Note: Not for learners, yet!**]

For Rugby Enthusiasts Greg and Carolynne Hewison have agreed to coordinate a *Rugby Circle* (or should that be a '*Rugby Oval*') for members who wish to get together to 'talk rugby' - especially since the Wales XV has become competitive again. The Carriage House Inn, on 90th and Macleod SE (in its 'Peanuts' bar), again plans to

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feature **6-Nations** European rugby games and other planned winter fixtures with visiting national teams. Ideas and suggestions should be passed on to Greg or Carolynne - at 293-7207 - or by E-mail to falwrth5@telusplanet.net.

Are there any other 'spheres' of interest? What about **CIRCLES** for - **Welsh cuisine?** - **Geneology?** - **Welsh Soccer?**
Get ideas and suggestions back to your committee to see what can be done!

What Some Folk will Do About 5 years ago a young lady from San Jose (Cal), of Mexican/American parentage, gave up everything in order to learn Welsh. 'Smitten' by actor Ioan Gruffudd - the 'very English' Capt. Hornblower (on reading a magazine article featuring the actor in the library where she worked) - set her on an adventure that would see her give up home and job and move more than 5,000 miles to Wales! The interview related to how Gruffudd spoke about being Welsh and how no one in Hollywood could pronounce his name. In her library, she managed to find a Welsh dictionary and a copy of the movie *Hedd Wyn*. Hearing Welsh poetry immediately made her fall in love with our language!

An Internet course followed; then a week's course in Atlanta and, conveniently, the Welsh Festival in San Jose - where she encountered many Welsh-speakers. All in all, it persuaded her to continue the learning experience in the very mouth of the Red Dragon, in Welsh Wales itself! For three years she continually renewed her visa to pursue this endeavour - even mastering enough of the language to teach it to adults in Newport (Mon). A deep love of Wales also developed from this experience! She also got accustomed to Britain's unique pub culture during her stay - and even met Huw Garmon, star of *Hedd Wyn* - and Ioan Gruffudd's sister and mother - but, alas, not the very man who started this Cymric adventure!

Now About The Man Cardiff born Ioan Gruffudd started his acting career as a 13-year-old lad in the Welsh 'soap' *Pobol y Cwm* (The Valley People). He later graduated from the Royal College of Dramatic Art (London) in 1995 and was cast as *Poldark* in that popular British TV series. He shot to prominence as *Horatio Hornblower* in the series that began in 1998 - which, incidentally, followed his appearance with Leonardo DiCaprio and Kate Winslet in the epic *Titanic* film. He has now made his home in Los Angeles to further his Hollywood career. Gruffudd moved to LA about two years ago and plans to purchase a home there - although he has no intention of staying too long in the USA. As a Welshman he always feels a 'hiraeth' (a longing) for Wales! His recent role in the *Fantastic Four* could see him land more major parts in Hollywood blockbusters - and he has already signed up for two more episodes in that series! Even if he has to import a Welsh speaking 'nanny' into LA - he promises that his children will be brought up to speak his native tongue!

A Sparkling Story Grenville Thomas from Clase, in Swansea, graduated in mining engineering at UC Cardiff and sought a career in Canada. Following a professional 'apprenticeship' in the tough nickel industry that took him to many parts of this country, he decided to strike out on his own! He founded a mining exploration company in Toronto, *Aber Resources* - later becoming the *Aber Diamond Corporation* where daughter, Eira Thomas, also became chief geologist.

'Aber' had a 40% stake in a company (Diavik, with whom Ms. Thomas once worked) that recently opened Canada's largest diamond mine. Diamond-bearing rocks or 'pipes' were discovered in the Lac de Gras area (in 1991) on land staked out by 'Aber' and laying the foundation for the Diavik Mine Project. In almost impenetrable tundra, the mine started producing diamonds during the last few years - and it is estimated some \$50 million worth will be produced annually!

Eira Thomas is also the CEO of Stornoway Diamond Corporation who recently acquired licenses for two sites in north-eastern Manitoba where, she believes, the province has become a new focus for diamond prospectors. De Beers, the world's largest diamond mining company, is also firmly entrenched in that area - a good endorsement, she thinks, for the aspirations of other (relatively much smaller) companies engaged in the prospecting business.

From age seven, Eira Thomas recalls spending summers with her father on explorations for mineral deposits. She went on to study geology at the University of Toronto. Grenville Thomas now lives in Toronto and maintains a keen interest in Welsh affairs - including rugby football! He is still very much involved in diamond exploration and development with his daughter!

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REMEMBER: POEMS & PINTS on OCTOBER 22 - CHRISTMAS DINNER on DECEMBER 4
