



Summer 2006 NewsLetter Issue Calgary Welsh Society



Cymdeithas Gymreig Calgary

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Croeso I'r Haf Another winter gone by - and not a bad one really! Hopefully, only favourable weather now lies ahead of us - unless those Calgary weather gremlins dictate otherwise - and they generally can, confound them!

The 2006-07 Committee The heading to this NewsLetter gives the information that everyone has been awaiting - no surprises, just what had been planned! Also, **Committee Members at Large** in the persons of **Jane Alabaster, Trish Coulson, Carolynne Hewison, Margaret Kuyt** and **Elaine Westlake** - complete the listing of those prepared to serve the Society for the year ahead. We regret not seeing **Maurice Benson's** name within the group after his many years of active involvement. As was previously announced, Maurice resigned as Vice-Pres prior to our spring meeting! We appreciate his past dedication to the Society - with the hope he will continue to attend our social get-togethers as often as he can!

April 29 Spring Meeting The 2006 A.G.M. and social evening was attended by 32 members where the business component was handled in double-quick time. The evening was therefore mainly devoted to the enjoyment of a potluck supper followed by a detailed presentation by member Gareth Walters on the finer points of undertaking genealogical research. Gareth (born in England) described the painstaking work he had done over many years relating to his Welsh heritage and its origin in the lower Swansea Valley. From his experience he offered valuable hints on approaches that could be adopted to optimize results at minimum cost. Ron Davies also contributed the benefit of his experience on research made into his family's background. Summaries of Gareth's and Ron's efforts - plus further written commentary from Ann Williams - will be appended hereto. Thanks to all three for the benefit of their knowledge of the subject in our Welsh environment - so riddled with language complexities, prevailing (19th century) public illiteracy, recorded inaccuracies and spelling errors and all inevitably compounded by the repetitive nature of Welsh surnames! Despite this tricky background, their researches became revealing and rewarding!

2006 Memberships Membership renewals for the current year presently stand at 60, representing all categories of membership. In terms of numbers, this figure equates to a total of 120 adults - the classification breakdown representing 25 Family category memberships, 12 Senior Couples, 9 Single Adult, 11 Single Senior and 3 Life Memberships.

Notably, a total of 13 (that is 18%) of our 2005 membership (across all categories) **even now have still not bothered to renew their obligations** to ensure the Society's financial well being! Despite the fact that a polite reminder, **consisting of a renewal form accompanied by a stamped/addressed return envelope**, was despatched to all 2005 members with the **New Year NewsLetter!** It is disappointing that this gesture fell by the wayside with such a significant number - for whatever reason!

While no exception will be made in the circulation of this NewsLetter **PLEASE BE ADVISED, RECIPIENTS WHO DO NOT CURRENTLY POSSESS A 2006 MEMBERSHIP CARD WILL BE REMOVED FROM THE SOCIETY'S MAILING AND TELEPHONE LISTINGS** if their situation **IS NOT REMEDIED BY JUNE 30th 2006!**

Check that you do have the necessary membership evidence - because new cards were promptly despatched within days of every payment being received by the Society! **DID YOUR RESPONSE NOT GET TO US - PLEASE DOUBLE CHECK?**

REVISED 2006 EVENTS PROGRAMME There have had to be changes made to the programme detailed in the last Spring Meeting Notice. **THE REVISED PROGRAMME IS NOW AS FOLLOWS:**

SATURDAY, July 29th **ANNUAL SUMMER PICNIC at LAKE BONAVISTA - from 3.00 pm to 6.00 pm.**
Events: Potluck dinner, games and beach access. FREE.

FRIDAY, AUGUST 18th **GWENT MALE VOICE CHOIR at GRACE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH.**
Doors open at 6.00 pm - Concert from 7.00 pm to 9.30 pm. Ticket pre-sales will be announced in due course. All seating \$15.00 per person.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 21st **POEMS & PINTS SOCIAL EVENING at the Irish Cultural Centre.**
Gather from 6.30 pm - for 7.00 pm start.
Events: Light snacks and entertainment - and maybe a little insight into Welsh Ghosts and 'Hauntings'. Cost: \$10.00 per person.

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 10th **ANNUAL CHRISTMAS DINNER at FORT CALGARY**
Cocktails 6 to 7 - Dinner at 7.00 pm. Cost yet to be finalized.
Events: Dinner and entertainment.

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Further announcements will be made in a timely manner for all these events - **but do please make a record of them now!**

Unique to Say the Least Member Morfudd Jones draws our attention to an article that appeared in the North American Welsh publication, *'YDrych'* a little while back - written by Gerald Morgan, Celtic Studies lecturer in the extra-mural department of Aberystwyth University College and a Director of its Celtic Summer School. Mr. Morgan wrote about the fact that so many Welsh villages are named after places with a biblical background - unique in that regard on the European continent. Hebrew names mixed with others of Welsh, French, Celtic, Latin, Irish and English origins - are only seen in Wales!

This feature has surprised many a first-time visitor to the Principality - when road signs like, 'Nazareth 2 miles', 'Bethesda 4 miles' or 'Bethlehem 6 miles' are encountered. The village of Bethlehem, nestled on the northern edge of the Black Mountains - between Llandilo and Llandovery in Dyfed - has provided the British Post Office with a great deal of publicity (or should that be notoriety) where at Christmas time it has been possible over a number of years to have Christmas cards postmarked as though originating from Christ's birthplace! This Carmarthenshire 'Bethlehem' also happens to be located near a village called 'Salem'.

Farther north, in the County of Caernarfon, another cluster of villages with biblical names can be found - names such as 'Carmel', 'Cesarea' and 'Nazareth'! All bear witness to the influence of the Nonconformist movement upon rural Welsh life during the 18th and 19th centuries! Some of these place names have even fooled scholars by their apparent ambiguity - sounding Welsh but in reality, emanating from the Middle East. Near Porthmadog, the name 'Golan' can be found - where language 'purists' have mistakenly believed the word related to 'Goleuni' the Welsh word for 'light'! But no such luck - the name came from the Golan Heights - now a disputed geographical area in Middle East politics, on the edge of the Sea of Galilee!

It was the Nonconformist movement that lay behind the fashion to use biblical names: it became the custom to give such a name to a new house of worship, the Welsh Chapel - as opposed to the hitherto dominant Anglican Church! A new chapel became the centre of a settlement - with a new village then tending to grow around it. The names that appeared on such chapels (usually built somewhat secretly in remote countryside areas) were widely copied in similar hamlets across the country. The names included those of Babel, Bethel, Beulah, Carmel, Ebenezer, Hermon, Jerusalem, Libanus (Lebanon), Moriah, Nebo, Salem, Saron, Seion - even the inappropriate name Sodom could be seen etched or cast on some nameplates that identified a few of the new chapels! Bethesda, near Bangor, became a major slate-quarrying centre and the largest Welsh township with a biblical name!

Mr. Morgan indicated that some people count sheep in order to induce sleep. In his own case, he gets the same result by counting Welsh biblical village names - and inevitably achieves a different total each time! He believes, as in previous years, people will continue to throng to the two Bethlehem's at Christmastime - the more peaceful one close to Llandilo, Dyfed and the other, the original near Jerusalem, in the perpetually troubled Middle East! (Diolch Morfudd am y nwydd!)

Harp - an instrument of Health A leading American heart specialist says he has found signs that harp music might help sick hearts. Dr. Kocheril, chief of cardiac electro physiology at the Carle Heart Center, Urbana Ill. has used a harpist as an accompanist in his operating theatre. His theory is based partly on work done at Harvard Medical School showing that varied rhythms created by healthy hearts are similar to note patterns in classical music. Some enthusiasts even believe the harp possesses special healing qualities - where resonant vibrations from live music may be effective at regulating quivering heart rhythms. This eminent specialist did not qualify his remarks to indicate that only the Welsh harp had this special quality - but he did indicate that other musical instruments and recorded music could offer similar benefits - keeping the heart healthy and rhythm disorders under control! To coin a phrase, 'If harp music be the food of life - play on, eh?'

Pontypool & Blaenavon Railway Society This railway restoration site is within a World Heritage location that also includes the **Big Pit** and the **Blaenavon Ironworks** - the latter being the best-preserved 18th century ironworks in Western Europe.

This year, the Pontypool & Blaenavon Railway Society (founded in 1980) embarks on a programme to extend its track a further three miles to the south from its current operation area and main station terminus at **Furnace Sidings**. The northern terminus, **Whistle Halt**, is at an elevation of 1,300 feet - the highest and (probably) most windswept railway station in all of England and Wales! The original railway, the Brynmawr to Blaenavon Railway, was built in 1866 to transport coal to Birmingham and the industrial Midlands and leased to the forerunner of the LMS railway company. Subsequently, the line was extended to join the GWR system at Abersychan. Interestingly, until 1941 the line was operated for passenger traffic by the GWR while goods traffic, over the same railway track, was run by the LMS until 1954.

The restoration society has a Website <http://www.pontypool-and-blaenavon.co.uk> from which viewers can get an impression of the railway and the work of the volunteers who operate it! The railway society is making an appeal to expatriates to show an interest in its objectives and to provide financial support! Presently, the society has the rails for the 3-mile extension but needs assistance in the purchase of sleepers (ties, that is), ballast and fencing. It anticipates that the project will take two years to complete - at a cost of about \$220,000.

All you railway enthusiasts - please contribute to this venture - which recalls the glory days of the Industrial Revolution and the impact that South Wales industries and railway systems had upon that development! The person to contact is Stan Googe who is a member of the restoration society and can be located at info@fletel.co.uk.

A Look at Crickhowell This old Powys coaching town, between Brecon and Abergavenny, is one of your Ed's favourite spots. The name, as spelt, is the anglicized form of **Crug Hywel** - meaning the rampart and ditch stronghold of Hywel (Welsh king, **Hywel Dda**). These defences are on Table Mountain, a feature dominating the town from the eastern side.

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Hywel Dda (Hywel The Good) was the first ruler to frame a code of laws governing the Welsh. The laws also extended to describe the duties of the Officers of the King's Household - where the lowliest functionary, the Royal Foot-holder, would be assigned to sit under the dining table and nurse the King's foot, scratching it when required! This bit of history dates back to around 950 A.D. when Hywel ruled a large part of Wales including the southwest area known as Deheubarth (southern region). He shared his brothers' lands in Ceredigion (Cardiganshire) and Ystrad Tywi (Vale of Tywi) after the death of their father, Cadell, about 909. He united their inheritance in 920 and acquired Gwynedd (North-west Wales) after the death of Idwal Foel in 942. He married Elen, daughter of Llywarch of Dyfed (who he might have also killed) upon whose death he took over the kingdom so as to 'complete the set' one might be tempted to say! Although accorded the epithet 'good', it would be wrong to assume that his goodness would have been unblemished: the essential attribute of a state builder in those days was ruthlessness!

But, to get back to the township that bears Hywel's name, there are so many outstanding things to investigate. Starting with the Bear Hotel with cobbled forecourt, archway entrance for post-horses and a Georgian frontage imposed on an older building; then Clarence Hall where the foundation stone was laid in 1890 by Prince Edward of Wales, Duke of Clarence, shortly before his death (whose fiancée, Mary of Hess, married the brother who then became George V); the ruins of Alisby's Castle built in 1272 by Norman Sir Grimbald Pauncefoot whose effigy may be seen in the parish church; the 14th century parish church itself, dedicated to Edmund son of King Alkemun of Saxony, adopted by King Offa of Mercia and martyred by the Danes in 870; two Nonconformist chapels, one of Baptist denomination built by a local mason in local stone - the second, Presbyterian, first built in 1805 and rebuilt some 24 years later; the bridge over the River Usk with its earliest reference dating back to 1538, rebuilt to feature stone piers and arches by the County administration in 1706 (at a cost of \$1,000), widened in 1809 and altered in 1830 to accommodate a new road - and more recently major repairs undertaken in 1979; Porth Mawr (the Great Gate) at the junction of the A40 roadway to Brecon and an entrance to *Cwrt-y-carw* (Stag Court) that belonged to a branch of the Herbert family that features a grotesque gargoyle (now almost featureless from erosion) that spits when it rains, as if to express contempt for a new post office building on an opposite corner that was faced in unconvincing sham stone - and finally, close to this edifice the White Hart Inn which still possesses an old tare board of the town's west toll gate. Crickhowell is such a small rural community within the Brecon Beacons National Park - but it has so much history to treasure!

Airbus 380 over N-Wales The world's biggest passenger airliner has done a fair bit of groundbreaking travel recently. Just a couple of months ago it was based in the Canadian Arctic for test purposes and has since been showcasing its massive double-decker concept at the Berlin Air Show. En route to London Heathrow from Berlin, the plane flew over the European Airbus plant in north Wales where its huge wings are made. Arriving at Heathrow it taxied to a specially designed pier that can simultaneously handle passenger loading or disembarking procedures at two levels!

Leeks in Cardiff Not the vegetable variety but the liquid one spelt 'ea' not 'ee'! Just a week after the Queen opened it, the new Welsh Assembly building sprang several leaks. There was heavy rain in the Cardiff area (what else is new) in the days following the Senedd's big opening ceremony on March 1st and, by the 8th, at least five water puddles had been found in corridors used by members and staff. The good old bucket had to be summoned to the rescue and be strategically placed to catch the worst of the drips - the water ones of course and not those of the political variety! The Assembly was located in the Bay area after a typical Welsh row that involved an attempt to locate it in the majestic Cardiff City Hall, in the capital city's internationally renowned civic centre. It would appear that local politicians were convinced money grew on trees - for, seven years after the Senedd came into being, an original building cost of some \$20 million escalated to \$40 million - and finished at \$130 million. Supporters of the Cardiff City Hall option, an edifice where no water leaks have ever been reported - must be livid!

**GOOD TASTE
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and Market Mall**

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Investigating Your Family History A Few Tips on How to Do It

The individual views and advice of our in-house panel of experts are given below for your consideration if you plan to embark upon an exercise to trace your ancestry!

1) Gareth Walters: The main focus of this talk was on genealogy in Wales - and how family history could be traced using home computers and doing so in an economic manner through websites and databases that are available for free. The first recommended website was that of the Mormons', the Church of Latter Day Saints (LDS), a relatively modern sect whose members (their religion suggests) are the only ones who enter heaven. It follows, of course, that non-Mormon ancestors of current Mormons would not be met in heaven - but the apparent problem was resolved by the baptism of identified non-Mormon ancestors. This led to the great Mormon interest in family history and genealogy and explains what one saw back in the 50's and 60's, the number of earnest young men in black suits copying parish records where they could - a task that was much easier in England than in Wales! Welsh Chapel records were far less complete than Anglican records - the latter being considered official it is recalled and where, for example, the local Registrar of Births, Marriages & Deaths would not be called upon to officiate at Anglican weddings!

Gareth's second recommendation was the use of 'FreeBMD' - a database that attempted to contain the entire England & Wales Index of Births, Marriages & Deaths from its inception in 1837 to about 1910. The facility is not yet complete but it is added to by volunteers on a monthly basis - to currently contain some 120 million entries, equating to about 80 percent of the complete Index. Despite its lack of completeness, it does provide a fairly good basis to identify the birth, marriage or death of an ancestor and a means to request a copy of the relevant UK certificate, a \$25 cost. One problem is that marriages are not cross-referenced to divulge a spousal name - a detail that may have to be found from census records.

Genealogy has an increasingly active following with more databases becoming available. Gareth recommends Ancestry.com as being a very effective option since it includes the England & Wales censuses of 1841, '51, '61, '71, '81, '91, and 1901. The site requires a fee - but can also be freely accessed by visiting the Latter Day Saints Family History Centre in Calgary. It is open to all, is a free service and is equipped with up-to-date computers and with help available from interested volunteers!

In summary, Gareth recommended the following websites: i] Family Search (LDS) www.familysearch.org ii] FreeBMD <http://freebmd.rootsweb.com> iii] Ancestry.com (through LDS) at the LDS Family History Centre, 2021-17 Ave.SW. 403-571-3700. Gareth also has CDs covering the Glamorgan censuses of 1841, '51, and '61 - and if anyone E-mails him at wgaretha@hotmail.com he would be pleased to try and help in tracking down any ancestors from the County of Glamorgan.

2) Ron Davies: In addition to the references that Gareth gave there are a few more that could be considered - such as one called GenesReunited, a UK group that can be used for information interchange and is good for the less usual names and certainly no good for the Davies, Jones or Thomas clans. The annual fee is around \$12 for this www.genesreunited.co.uk website. All the England & Wales census returns (1841- 1901) are available through www.ancestry.com at a cost of about \$50 over a four-month period. Ron considers this one to be the best since you can get the information in your own home. For information on Scottish heritage www.ancestralscotland.com is available while Irish information is difficult to obtain. The names, dates, ships, etc of immigrants to Canada are available at the Calgary Public Library on microfiche. They are not presently available on the web. Some immigrants to Canada came through Ellis Island (New York) as all US immigrants obviously did. The Ellis Island records are free on the web at www.ellisland.org.

Complete BMD records can be found on www.1837online.com at a cost of \$50 per year. There are free systems but they are generally incomplete and frustrating as a result. Information on fatalities during both world wars may be found on The Commonwealth War Graves Commission website at www.gwgc.org.

Ron offers his assistance via the Internet to anyone wishing to seek more information on genealogy - at ron.davies@shaw.ca.

3) Ann Williams: Our Calgary Public Library is second to none and can provide free access to some of the resources provided by Ancestry.com. This is a respected organization that puts transcribed genealogical records on the Internet for its subscribers. The library edition has less material but includes the 'jewel' of the website - the transcribed census returns for every census taken in England & Wales released to the public - all returns taken every 10 years from 1841 through 1901. The website is freely available at library branches across the city - and has recently been made accessible from home to all members!

From the Calgary Public Library website www.calgarypubliclibrary.com select 'E-Library' and enter your library card number. At the next screen scroll down to the 'History & Genealogy' heading and click on the first item, 'Ancestry Library Edition'. From the home page choose 'UK Census Collection' and, at the next screen, scroll down to choose a specific census. (Note: At the moment, the 1841 census is found on their home page under 'Recent'.)

Census returns are a snapshot in time and finding an ancestor in a census will reveal where and with whom they lived, where they were born, the work they did (and in later Welsh census returns) whether they spoke Welsh, English or both languages.

As with anything Welsh, difficulties can arise from its limited number of surnames - but finding a relative in a census return is a thrill because it is a written validation of your family! Ann hopes that those who try the website will have fun with it!

Ann is also a member of the Alberta Family Histories Society and coordinator of their England & Welsh Special Interest Group. Contact information is available on the Alberta Family Histories Society website at www.afhs.ab.ca.

There you go folks, all the information you need to go to town on your ancestors - whether they be famous or infamous! We are indebted to all three society members for their helpful input and for taking the time to be of service to all of us! **Diolch yn fawr!**

**** DON'T FORGET TO RECORD THE REVISED PROGRAMME OF EVENTS FOR THE REST OF THE YEAR ****