

CYMDEITHAS GYMREIG

CALGARY WELSH SOCIETY



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NEWSLETTER ISSUE

The Society Executive for our 102<sup>nd</sup> Year.

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**CASINO BONANZA** The outcome of our 2-night 'casino experience' last July exceeded everyone's expectations when we received formal notification (in November) our efforts had realized the magnificent sum of **\$103,700!** This significantly changes the picture regarding how we will be able to impact the greater Calgary community with our unique blend of cultural interests. Immediately, our executive committee is pursuing a number of promotional initiatives including establishing a **Trust Scholarship Fund** and the provision of resources to entice well-known Welsh choirs and artists to the city and province. The possibility of joint venture promotions with neighbouring societies is also a consideration of interest! Members will be advised of progress in these efforts!

**THE 2007 CHRISTMAS DINNER** This final event of the year's calendar was attended by 72 members and friends who enjoyed good food, good company and good entertainment! Notably, professional actor **Russell Roberts** (no stranger to Calgary as we all know) gave us the benefit of his talents with a Dylan Thomas reading and an amusing parody on the **Twelve Days of Christmas** complete with a perfected Daniel Day-Lewis 'Oirish' accent! (Day-Lewis happened to be a room-mate of Russ's while both were at the Bristol Old Vic.) Musical entertainment was provided by **David Hewison** on tenor saxophone and **Jane Morgan** (Dai's one time high school band teacher) on clarinet - while the entire gathering was lead in carol singing by Dianne Williams (and accompanist Iwan Saunders) who brought the festive evening to a close in an appropriate manner! The individual efforts of Trish, Pam, Carolynne, Elaine and Wayne contributed in no small measure to the success of the occasion!

**Y SENEDD** For many expatriates the shape of UK politics has changed greatly since most of us resided in that part of the world. In particular, Wales now has a separate national administration - created under the **1998 Government of Wales Act** - and providing a degree of self-government with powers to amend the application of English law within the Principality. These powers were further expanded in the **2006 Government of Wales Act** enabling the **Welsh Assembly** to now pass its own laws - but always subject to **Legislative Competence Orders (LCOs)** granted by Westminster! Historically, England and Wales were always constituent countries of the United Kingdom sharing one legal system, **English Law**. As such, the two areas were treated as one entity - a situation that prevailed from the days of the Roman occupation when the whole of Britain was known as the **Province of Britannia**. Welsh law developed from this base and was first formalized by **Hywel Dda** (Hywel the Good) during his reign as the 'king' of most of Wales during the period 942 - 950 AD. The **Statute of Rhuddlan** in 1284 replaced Welsh criminal law with English law but Welsh law continued to apply for civil cases until the annexation of Wales to England in the 16<sup>th</sup> century

So, what do we know of the present **Welsh Assembly**? It is the third since its inception in 1999 and comprises 60 elected members across a spectrum of 4 main parties: **Labour** (26 members), **Plaid** (15), **Welsh Conservative** (12) and **Welsh Liberal/Democrat** (6). A lone independent member completes the picture. The **Presiding Officer** of the Assembly (Speaker) is **Lord Dafydd Elis-Thomas** (earlier a Plaid MP - subsequently elevated to the House of Lords) while the **First Minister** (Prime Minister, effectively) is **Rhodri Morgan**, leader of the largest political party in the Assembly and also a past Westminster MP. Assembly elections are held every four years! At the last election, on May 3<sup>rd</sup> 2007, a weakened Labour Party narrowly escaped humiliation in its former stronghold. Rhodri Morgan was still re-elected First Minister but, this time, at the helm of a minority administration because the Liberal/Democrats 'pulled the plug' on a previous coalition with Tory and Plaid members - because some Lib/Dems believed there could have been a risk of aiding the Tories achieve their first taste of power above local level anywhere in the UK since 1997. It is apparent that the opposition can now easily outvote Labour thus leaving its almost luckless leader to seek day-to-day deals in order to get contentious issues through the Assembly - and survive in the process!

Interestingly, Wales still elects MPs to the UK Westminster Parliament (as do Scotland and Ulster) and four representatives to the European Parliament in Brussels. Equally of note, Welsh Assembly members command an annual salary equivalent to some \$97,000 Can. PLUS an additional \$160,000 if a First Secretary or \$83,000 if a Presiding Officer or House Leader and \$12,000 if a committee chairperson! All benefit from generous travel and living expenses - so, the current UK political scene would appear to be somewhat over-saturated with bodies akin to a "**Jobs for the Boys (and Girls)**" situation - but now, alas, gone berserk! Just think of it - 60 members of **Senedd Cymru**, an undiminished representation within the 646 Westminster MPs, another 737 members of the House of Lords to accommodate, 129 members of the Scottish Parliament, 78 members of the Ulster Parliament and Senate, 78 members of the European Parliament - all with attendant costs of aides, secretaries, gofers and splendid historic/administrative buildings to maintain from a rapidly diminishing public purse! Times have certainly changed have they not? Indeed, if Nye Bevan was alive today - he'd die of 'cretin' induced apoplexy at the very thought, eh?

**ANTHONY TURNS 70** Oscar winning actor **Sir Anthony Hopkins** recently celebrated this achievement on New Year's Eve near his Taibach (Port Talbot) birthplace along with a gathering of 50 of his oldest friends. The **Margam Park Orangery** was the venue for the 'birthday bash' to which the celebrated one-time local lad had asked for all his local childhood pals be invited. Hopkins grew up as a baker's son in that part of Port Talbot and first started acting at the local YMCA in the 50s. His wife, Stella, organized it along with a friend of the couple, Eve Williams. Fellow Port Talbot actor, Michael Sheen, attended as did Graham Jenkins - brother of the late Richard Burton. The picturesque 18<sup>th</sup> Century Orangery is now owned by the Neath & Port Talbot Council.

**MORE PORT TALBOT TALENT** Opera-singing cell-phone salesman **Paul Potts** recently won the **Britain's Got Talent** television competition that was seen by an audience of some 11 million viewers. Potts, 36, who also hails from Port Talbot, is a fan of opera legend Luciano Pavarotti. He apparently 'wowed' the competition judges with his version of **Nessun Dorma** following which the programme host said, "The whole country has gone Paul Potts potty!" There was an overwhelming public response to this performance while an appearance in New York, afterwards, also drew rave reviews! His first CD, **ONE CHANCE**, recorded with the **London Symphony Orchestra**, shows his remarkable talent as a singer - with an effortless and 'melodious' voice! Neath soprano, **Katherine Jenkins**, invited Potts to appear at her **Kathfest** last July saying it was an honour to have him make his debut at the Margam Oratory having shown Britain and the world what a fantastic performer he was! She added he had a natural voice and his version of Pavarotti's classic "made the hairs on your neck stand up!" Further, it was going to be a very special day with Paul, herself and **Juan Diego Florez** (the hottest tenor on the planet right now, she thinks) all performing on the same bill. So, all of you, now run out and buy that CD and, take your Ed's word, it **IS** impressive! Don't forget, either, the beautiful Katherine also has a glorious voice - with a number of successful CDs selling world-wide in record numbers!

Incidentally, last April, **Dame Vera Lynn** (our *Original Forces Sweetheart*) celebrated her 90<sup>th</sup> birthday at the **Imperial War Museum**, London, and was serenaded there by **Katherine Jenkins** with songs that included *We'll Meet Again* and *The White Cliffs of Dover* that she made so popular during the World War II years! Katherine Jenkins appears to be in demand for Command Performances and such special appearances in the UK these days!

**WELSH-FRENCH 1<sup>st</sup> LADY** The current French Prime Minister appointee, **Francois Fillon**, has a wife from **Llanover**, near **Abergavenny**, Mon. **Penelope Fillon** (nee Clarke) was the daughter of a local solicitor and moved to France as a young law student where she met one of the rising stars of French politics. Their wedding took place in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century church of St. Bartholomew in Llanover. She studied French to A-level at the King Henry VIII Grammar School in Abergavenny, becoming an outstanding student and an accomplished linguist in the making! Described as tall, elegant and unpretentious, she is a keen horsewoman and popular in French political circles. British officials in Paris say she is loyal to Wales and proud of her Welsh roots and, by admission, remaining an ardent supporter of Welsh rugby where her enthusiasm dominates even in games with her adopted country! When interviewed she declared she was not a Paris party animal and, unlike Cherie Blair, she had no new role to play as the wife of a PM! The Fillon's have five children - and she, the distinction of being the first British woman married to a French PM!

**A WELSH UNDERWORLD** Regarding what was considered to be pure fable for centuries is now believed to have existed at one time! A 19<sup>th</sup> century map in a North Wales town hall may be able to unravel one of Celtic history's most enduring mysteries, the location of the legendary **Land of the Dead!** Celtic experts claim that a map in the **Llangollen** town hall could rewrite the history of one of the world's greatest hidden landmarks. According to Welsh mythology, the **Land of the Dead** - or **Annwn; the Celtic Underworld** - was ruled over by **Gwyn ap Nudd** (Gwyn, son of Nudd) who escorted the souls of the departed to that destination while accompanied by a pack of supernatural hounds! It may now be that a grain of truth actually exists in the story from which it developed - with evidence seeming to point towards **Ruabon** and the **Halkyn Mountains**.

Steve Blake, author of the **Keys to Avalon**, a book arguing that the myths of King Arthur were firmly rooted in North Wales, suggested that **Llangollen** and the **Dee Valley** were rich in this piece of folklore. Central to this opinion was the fact, **St. Collen**, from whom Llangollen took its name, established a church and a parish in that area. One tale suggested Collen also battled with Gwyn ap Nedd on a nearby hill. But, at the same time, Glastonbury Abbey also laid claim to Collen as its first Abbot despite Collen being almost exclusively mentioned in early Welsh texts, and his grave recorded in Llangollen churchyard as late as the 18 Century. Blake posed the question why someone would leave his home parish, travel 200 miles over hostile enemy territory to set up an abbey in a marsh, it just didn't make sense? Archaeology and the Ordinance Survey map at Llangollen town hall could help substantiate the North Wales claim to some legends also held dear by Glastonbury! Past research and surveys have high-lighted the greatest concentration of bronze and iron-age burial chambers anywhere in the world to be on Ruabon and Halkyn mountains! This fact could favour the belief that the area was significant - and an ancient Welsh work, **The Stanzas of the Graves**, gave further clues regarding who may actually be buried there!

The **Stanzas** apparently indicated that people of nobility from all over the Celtic world were brought to this area for burial - thereby making it one of their most important and sacred places! Further, the whole area was bordered by the **River Dee**, still regarded as the most sacred of Celtic rivers, adding even more conviction to the belief! More than 500 burial chambers exist on Halkyn Mountain although modern maps only show those on the edges of the **Eglwyseg** escarpment because a vast majority of them were destroyed during World War II when the area was extensively used for decoy bombing exercises by the R A F.

