

Cymdeithas Gymraeg



Victoria Welsh Society

Newsletter: Ebrill 2007, April 2007

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In Memorium

We were all very saddened to learn of the death of Gwyn Jarvis, a long time member of our Society.

Gwyn passed away recently after some years of ill health. Pastor Gareth Evans informed us that the family asked for the following announcement to be included in this newsletter:

IN MEMORY

(June 12th 1921 - February 3rd 2007)

Gwyn Jarvis passed away peacefully in her home with her husband and family by her side, on February 3rd 2007. She was a true "Taffy" and a member of the Society since 1975. Not only was she a staunch supporter, but also she served nine years on the Executive until her failing health prevented her from taking part. She gave the Society many hours of work and will be fondly remembered.

Dates, Directions, Developments

♪ On Saturday, May 12th the Arion Male Voice Choir will be hosting a joint concert with the Vancouver Welsh Men's Choir. It is to be held in the Farquhar Auditorium of the University of Victoria at 7:30 pm. These two choirs promise an evening extravaganza of

harmony and music. For more information phone 721-8480.

☀ The Society's annual BBQ will be held in June – the specific date has yet to be determined. It is hoped that the afternoon will include modelling of historic Welsh costumes.

♪♪ During the week of July 10th – 15th, the world-renowned annual festival of music, song and dance will be celebrated in Llangollen. *Byd gwyn fydd byd a gano!* The 2007 International Eisteddfod is the 61st festival to be held there, and this year there will be two new categories - a Male Choir competition and a World Street Dance Competition. Details can be found on the website www.internationaleisteddfod.co.uk

Every effort is being made to refine and update the Society's web site. Photos taken at the AGM in October and also those taken at the St. David's Day Banquet in March should be added soon. It has also been suggested that we could include photos taken by members that are relevant to both our Victoria experiences and ones that pertain to our connections to Wales. Please contact the Editor (Richard Adams) if you have any items that could be included on our web site.

♥♥ Have you forgotten to renew your membership in the Society? We really need your help in maintaining the energy of this organization. You are urged to read the last article in this newsletter and respond

positively by sending your cheque to our Treasurer, as detailed on Page 8.

Our Saint David's Day Banquet



St. David's Day was on a Thursday this year and we held our annual banquet two days later on Saturday, March 3, at the University of Victoria's attractive University Club. This location has been favoured

for the past few years. Approximately 65 persons were present, including a few guests who were there for their first time.

The buffet style dinner was scrumptious – it included roast beef, chicken, seafood, salad, and fancy desserts. Denis' bilingual program outlined an evening of toasts, speeches, harp music and singing. Today's electronic-mail world allowed us to hear greetings from a number of other Welsh societies, including one from New Zealand - they were received in both English and in Welsh.

Dr. David Lintern was the Master of Ceremonies and he interlinked program activities with quips, jokes and impromptu comments delivered in his inimitable way. Richard Adams gave the keynote address. He spoke about the passions and problems of modern day Wales.

The evening's musical entertainment was provided by well-known harpist Alison Vardy and two singers - Susan Smedley (soprano) and Philip Reilly (tenor). The harp was both a featured instrument and an accompaniment to the singers who performed Welsh folk songs as solos and duets. All three performers were wonderful.

The delightful evening closed with a rousing version of the national anthem sung in Welsh.

Sylvia Preto-Jones

Welsh Rarebits



This year Dafydd Wyn Morgan will be undertaking a climb that can't be replicated for another 100 years: He plans to climb Snowdon seven times in seven days along seven different routes in the seventh month of the seventh year of this millennium, finishing his seventh summit on the 7th of the 7th, 2007. Through sponsorships, he hopes to raise money for Air Ambulance Cymru and Tregaron Community Groups. Check out: www.walktregaron.co.uk

For those with a story to tell (and isn't that everyone?) the new technology means they can create a digital story that can be put on a web site. So don't bother with YouTube, take a look at mini-movies made and edited by people at digital storytelling workshops around Wales. The idea is to show the richness of life in Wales through the stories made by the people of Wales. The web site is:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/wlaes/capturewales/>

Be the first to give a youngster you know an E-book. Chris Williams, who resides in the UK, has written one with a strong Welsh theme: "*The Story of Rhys*". It's about a young Welsh dragon who lives with his Mum in a cave on the Great Orme in North Wales. It's written in English, includes some Welsh words and phrases, and is suitable for children from 5 years and older. You can download it from a computer or laptop at: www.thestoriesofrhys.com



the world's first passenger

train ran from Mumbles to Swansea on March 25, 1807. The celebrations of this 200th anniversary event were held at the National Waterfront Museum in Swansea last month - they attracted train buffs from various parts of the world. Over the years the train was powered by steam, battery, petrol, diesel and finally electricity. Although this historic train made its last run in 1960, there continue to be attempts to bring it back.

Aberaeron, Ceredigion [Cardiganshire] is celebrating its bicentenary this year. Many events have been planned for this historic occasion, which reaches a climax in July and August. Any news from people who moved from the area would be welcomed. Visit these websites for more information: aberaeron.info
http://www.bbc.co.uk/wales/mid/sites/aberaeron/bicentenary_index.shtml

Nixon's News from the Okanagan



St. David's Day in the Okanagan

We discovered (at least David Hughes discovered) that there was a Welsh society in Vernon (about 1 hour drive from here), and apparently there is also one in Penticton. So David, Marilyn, his wife, and I drove up to Vernon for their St. David's Day dinner. The celebration was held in the senior's hall and catered by the staff there. A good buffet-style meal, with soup, a main course of chicken cordon blue, veggies and potatoes and also roast beef. Plus there were two salads available. We arrived in time to enjoy the no host bar (naturally)! The room was set up for 80 people and about seventy came. We sat at a table with a couple from Kelowna, who

had also driven up – Bob and Jan Jones. He knows David Lintern (that fellow sure gets around!).

The evening started off with entertainment by the Marksmen, a seven men group of a-cappella singers who were quite good. They had included *All through the Night* and *Men of Harlech* in their repertory. Following their performance, we had dinner and the usual toasts. Then the Vernon Welsh Men's Choir entertained us. Again it was an a cappella choir of ten men. They sang a variety of songs including *Myfanwy*, *Sospan Fach* and *Calon Lan*. After their presentation, there was a reading from Dylan Thomas's *Under Milk Wood*, which was well done. This was followed by door prizes (I did not win anything!) and then there was a sing-a-long. Unfortunately, we had to leave in the middle of it, as Marilyn had to go to work on Friday, - she was teaching a class at 8:30 am! Such is it to be retired; you can stay out late if you wish.

Anyway, it was an enjoyable night. The sad part is that there were no young members that I could see in the society, and those that were there appeared to be children of the members. How did I know? Well, all the members were wearing name-tags on strings and the rest of us had stick-on ones!

Hope that the Victoria celebration went well. Best wishes to everyone in the Society.

Maggie Nixon

Roots, Reflections and Recall



The Board and Trustees of the Society are very keen to "put a face" on the membership. Hence, a new idea is being launched this month. Members are invited to write a short piece on some important

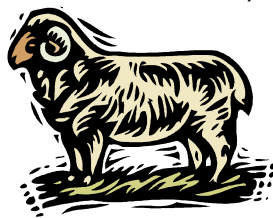
link they have with Wales. This could be reflecting on where they grew up, or recalling some memorable location where they holidayed in their youth, or even fondly remembering a stay with relatives at a farm, a resort or a village or town somewhere in Wales.

So, tell us your story and help give some living history to this newsletter.

Here is our first piece, entitled: My Village

It's not much of a place to look at - an ancient church, the New Inn, a two roomed school (no longer used), seven houses (one of which has the Post-office, unless it's been closed for the purposes of efficiency) and, I nearly forgot, a public convenience, built in 1938. Yes, that's the village of Ystradfellte. When I went to school there, in the thirties, the real estate was even less, as two modern houses were built between 1950 and 1980. The reason for this delightful lack of progress is that the village is in the Breconshire National Park and so very well protected from the plans of developers. (The park was established in the late thirties.)

Roundabout are numbers of hill farms - Garreg Fawr, Nant-y-wenynen, Porth, Cwm Porth, Pen-llwyn-einon, Plas-y-darren, Nant-y-carred, to name a few, and sheep outnumber people by far.



Strictly speaking I never lived in Ystradfellte but, for a few years, in the nearby hamlet of Tair-heol. This has four cottages, three of which are now for the use of Youth Hostellers – Tair-heol was a centre for mechanical activity in my very young days as my father, who was a very keen motor-cyclist, seemed always to be doing

something to his own bike or else to that of some farm boy. One might say that Tair-heol was to Ystradfellte much as Oshawa is to Toronto!

Ystradfellte is named for the river Mellte, a tributary of the Nedd (Neath) and a half-mile from the village the river disappears underground to flow through the famous White Horse caves. In a dry summer one can walk and wade from one end to the other, a distance of about a quarter of a mile and see the white, water-sculpted limestone that looks like a horse's head and neck from one angle. At least one used to be able to see it but of course things change with the passage of time. The geology of the district is mainly limestone and caves and waterfalls abound. One of the more famous falls is Sgwd-yr-eira, down river towards Pont-Nedd-Fechan, where the river Hepste tumbles over a rock ledge into the Mellte. The country surrounding this Mellte valley is dominated by the Fans - prominent mountains; Fan Nedd, Fan Lia, Fan Fawr. On a fine June day there's no place I'd rather be but in November in the rain I'll take Victoria.

So there it is, the place of my earliest memories with its ancient church of St. Mary, which was largely constructed by Cistercian monks in the 12th. Century. It was prominent enough to be visited by Edward I in 1281. The parish was devastated in the Great Plague of 1349 but after this nothing much happened until the arrival of the American Army, in 1943, to set up an artillery firing range, unless you consider the arrest of Dic Penderyn for his part in the Merthyr riots in 1832.

If you want to get there take the A 4059 from Hirwaun towards Brecon then one mile after the village of Penderyn turn left along a narrow road to Ystradfellte, 3 miles. Watch

out for sheep! From the West take B 4242 to Pont-Nedd-Fechan then it's 4 miles after you fork left at the Angel hotel. Again, watch out for sheep!

Denis Brown

A Cut Above

You have to be a real expert to command the attention of over 100 people who have both a great interest and a real aptitude in carpentry and carving. We have such an expert in our Society – David Western. He recently gave a talk on Welsh Lovespoons to the Vancouver Island Woodworkers' Guild. His knowledge of the history of these artefacts and the samples of his work that were on display really held the attention and admiration of the group.

Anyone who is interested in acquiring some ability in carving a Lovespoon should check out the course he is running, once again, at Camosun College this summer. It will focus on knife carving utilizing a simple set of easily available tools. Beginners will use the Welsh Lovespoon as their main project, while more experienced carvers will be given a series of projects that will advance their carving skills and manual techniques. It is a 3-day (18 hour) intensive course that runs from July 9th to July 11th, and the fee is \$275. More information can be found on Camosun's web site:

<http://www.camosun.bc.ca/ce/trades.php#TAC433V>. You can also phone the Camosun College Trades and Technical Continuing Education Department at (250) 370-4563.

David also has a great redesigned website that shows wonderful insight into his skills, testimonies from his past clients, and examples of his highly individual Lovespoons. He invites you to explore:

www.davidwesternlovespoons.com

We all have stories to tell

The Board and its Trustees have reflected on how to stimulate interaction between people in the Society. One suggestion involved encouraging younger relatives to interview an older member of their family so that we could read about the depth and variety of interesting experiences that have characterized so many of the folk in our Society. Also, it was suggested that we should encourage relatives and friends to write about their connections with Wales. Such interviews and personal stories could be based on things like experiences, family albums, mementoes, and interests in the past or even in the future.

Our first contributor, to what we hope is a new and on-going feature in our Society's newsletters, is the nephew of Trustee Sylvia Preto-Jones.

Here is Trevor Jones' story:

My grandfather, who died a month before I was born, grew up in Wales. My father, who was born and raised in Canada, never really expressed any particular kinship with his Welsh roots. Yet, something in me resonated, and I feel a connection with all things Welsh.

Since I was young I've had a fascination with my Welsh heritage - something that's often raised eyebrows from those curious as to why a man born and raised in sunny California would feel such an affinity for the rainy countryside of Wales.

My first real connection with my family history came in 1985, on my 21st birthday. As a present, my parents gave me a Brit-

Rail pass and airfare to London so that I could experience Wales and England for myself - by myself; a fitting way to begin life as an adult. That following summer I spent an unforgettable month traveling around London, north to the West Midlands, and finally entering Northern Wales, making my way to Anglesey to see where my grandfather grew up.

I arrived in the village of Newborough, knowing that my grandfather was buried behind an old church somewhere. As I wandered around that strangely quiet town, I came up to an old graveyard. There I found a very old man, apparently the caretaker, who was clipping back weeds that had grown over many of the headstones. He greeted me with a big smile and asked if I needed help. "I'm looking for



my grandfather's grave marker," I told him, "but I don't know if I have the right place? His name was Owen Lewis Jones" "You mean this one 'ere?" He was standing directly by the very grave I was looking for!

Being near that headstone commemorating a grandfather I had never met, in the very village where he grew up, I finally felt the connection I had been looking for. This experience made my curiosity about Wales seem so much more personal and real. Since that trip I've maintained my fondness for Wales, and have been fortunate enough to return several times. However, it was still difficult to feel a real link living so far away. Now, thanks to modern technology, that disconnect has changed. About four years ago I started listening to BBC Radio Wales and BBC Radio Cymru through my computer. This was remarkable because they weren't previously recorded programs,

but rather live radio - with absolutely no delay what so ever.

I started listening while I worked - anything ranging from modern Welsh music (there are a number of incredibly talented bands today), to news shows, to call-in talk programs. There was one particular call-in program – "*The Chris Needs Show*", which catered to an older listening audience, but which was particularly amusing because of the presenter's flamboyant personality. As I listened to all kinds of people around Wales calling in to speak with Chris, I noticed that there was the occasional international caller. So, on a whim, I e-mailed the program to let them know how much I enjoyed the show, and that Chris had a fan as far away as California. Within a matter of minutes, my phone rang at work. It was the show's producer telling me that he had just read my e-mail, and wanted to know if I'd like to speak with Chris Needs, right then - on the air! I thought this was unbelievable. The Internet has made our world so small and accessible - something my grandfather would never have believed was possible. I can barely believe it myself! Over the following six months I had five "on air" conversations with Chris Need - my friends were so amused when I told them who I was talking with on the phone.

Thanks in large part to the "global village" of the Internet, I've been able to keep up my interest in Wales and my family history. A number of years ago I joined the Welsh American Society of Northern California in an effort to connect with others in my area; I'm teaching myself Welsh via a CD-ROM computer course; I've developed a passion for soccer, and was able to purchase kits from my favourite sides - The New Saints Football Club in Llansantffraid, and Cardiff City FC. I have even found a Welsh tea, "Murroughs Welsh Brew Tea (Paned

Gymreig"; some Felinfoel Ale (brewed near Llanelli), and some delicious Red Dragon, Harlech, and Tintern cheeses from Abergavenny at a local import market. While these things may be superficial, they have allowed me to enjoy a tangible connection to a place I've never been able to call home, but have always felt was a part of me.

*Trevor Jones
San Anselmo, California*

Staying Alive

Our Society is struggling! The number of paid up members is declining. Many planned events receive only tepid responses. The poorly attended AGM indicates a limited interest in giving direction to the organization. Positions on the Board remain unfilled. We are over-reliant on a small handful of people who do most of the organizational work.

This is indeed a bleak picture. However, it seems that the state of our Society is not very different from many others in various parts of the world. Wales' expatriate groups are under threat largely because their younger generations are not interested in joining and promoting their culture. The once strong network of societies credited with keeping Welsh traditions and the Welsh language alive around the world were usually set up by émigrés. These earlier societies often had significant links with churches or chapels in the "receiving" countries. But as these connections diminished, attention became focused on eisteddfodau and touring male-voice choirs. These cultural events seem to have a limited appeal to the children of those with strong ties to Wales. By comparison, Irish societies seem more vibrant, perhaps because they are often based around pubs

and revelry; St. Patrick's Day celebrations attest to this. Green beer and tenuous links with the Emerald Isle obviously have a greater attraction than hymn singing, waving leeks, daffodils, and attending concerts given by choirs of silver-haired men singing well known songs. Why is it that shamrocks have a greater international pull than red dragons? Surely provocations and questions such as these deserve a few Letters to the Editor!

Ironically, Wales has never had such a high profile abroad, especially in areas of entertainment and music, but at the same time traditional societies are in decline. Some see compensation in the way that people of Welsh heritage are now connecting not as groups, but as individuals through websites and the Internet. An excellent example of this phenomenon is *Social Welsh and Sexy* at www.swsuk.com, with one of the patrons being Bryn Terfel. Another such site is www.walesunited.com, which allows Welsh people scattered around the world to communicate with each other, whether by the Internet or by actually meeting while traveling for business or pleasure.

We must ask ourselves if there is any medium or long-term hope for the Welsh Society of Victoria? You are urged to write a letter to the Editor and express your opinion.

Lastly, here is another prompt for those who have not yet renewed their membership in the Society:

Please send relevant information to our Treasurer – Jen Pearson, at 4277 Houlihan Place, Victoria, V8N 3T2. Cheques (\$16 - Single, \$24 - Family) should be made out to "Victoria Welsh Society".