

Cymdeithas Gymraeg



Victoria Welsh Society

Newsletter: Chwefror, Mawrth 2006 / February, March - 2006

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Dates, directions and developments

Dydd Gwyl Dewi hapus – for those who have not yet been able to commit to attending our annual banquet to honour our Patron Saint, the registration form has once again been included at the back of this newsletter. The Saint David's Day dinner will be held on March 4th at the University Club on the University of Victoria's campus (check location and excellent parking facilities at www.uvic/maps/parking.html). We will gather in the lounge at 5:30 p.m. and begin proceedings at 6:00 p.m. A speaker, musicians and a variety of surprises are all on the program. As this is one of our most significant social affairs, you are urged to attend and, of course, you are encouraged to bring as many friends as you wish – belonging to the Victoria Welsh Society is not a pre-requisite for coming to this banquet.

Under Milk Wood – will play at Langham Court Theatre from February 23rd to March 11th. Single tickets cost \$17. and go on sale Feb. 9th. Box Office Tel.#: 384-2142. See web site: www.langhamcourtheatre.bc.ca

Eisteddfod Gerddorol Ryngwladol Llangollen – this will be the 60th annual Eisteddfod to be held in Llangollen. It will run between July 4th and Sunday 9th. In addition to the usual colourful, international array of dancers and singers, highlights will include Bryn Terfel, Katherine Jenkins, and four great Welsh Male Choirs singing in unison. See web site: www.international-eisteddfod.co.uk

The winner of our Christmas quiz, whose signed submission was *Anon*, has been discovered! He is **Malcolm Davies**. It was agreed that anyone who submitted the name "Harry Secombe" as an answer to the question: *Who was the Welshman that Shakespeare called "not in the role of common man?"* really deserved the first prize - which was a packet of crisps (but it was wrapped in Christmas paper!) Of course, Malcolm won because of his wit, not accuracy. He was unable to attend the Yuletide lunch because he was providing support to his wife, Sandra, who had broken her shoulder. We hope that she is now fully recovered and able to cope with her husband's sense of humour!

Welsh Rarebits

First there was a Welsh edition of the board game Monopoly and now you can buy a Welsh language version of Scrabble – complete with vital tiles using "LL" and "DD". This game was so popular that it sold out before Christmas and keen Welsh wordsmiths had to wait until the end of January for a fresh supply to reach the shops. There are so few games available in the Welsh language that the license holders are guaranteed continued good sales, especially as many schools are expressing great interest.

Harp-therapy is being used to ease stress and pain experienced by patients while they receive chemotherapy in a treatment centre in Cardiff. Classically trained Welsh harpist Bethan Hughes, who has worked in hospices and hospitals in the USA, endorses doctors' belief that the sound of the harp decreases blood pressure, encourages oxygenation and generally helps patients' bodies whilst they are undergoing their necessary treatment.

Ruthin born actor Rhys Ifans (who has a lovely Welsh accent) has starred in a number of box-office successes recently, and now has started to film "*Young Hannibal: Behind the Mask*". This will be a movie prequel to those films about Hannibal Lecter, the evil, mythic, cannibal. The film will provide background that helps to explain how the Dr. Lecter turned into the urbane monster portrayed by Sir Anthony Hopkins in "*Silence of the Lambs*", a role for which he received an Oscar.

Welsh whisky was launched by *Penderyn Whisky* in New York in December; the company is named after a small village in the Brecon Beacons National Park. Its single malt is called "*Aur Cymru*", has a golden glow, and was well received. But, as for the Welsh wine industry it was left spluttering after being mocked by Mr. Berlusconi, the Italian Prime Minister. He sent a case of Italian wine to the Swedish prime Minister, saying it would help him to recover from the Welsh wine served at

the European Union conference hosted by Tony Blair in Brussels in December.

The concept of Welsh being made an official European Union language received a boost following a new deal on Spanish minority languages a few months ago. For the first time, 3 non-official languages – Catalan, Basque and Galician – can be used at EU meetings, and later this year it is expected they will be used in the European Parliament. For years, Plaid Cymru has been campaigning for a similar status for the Welsh language, and now believes that it is time for it to be adopted by the EU.

A Taste of Wales

A vignette for St. David's Day, in homage to Dylan Thomas – by Haydn Mason



A blast of the steam whistle signals the hour of six, informing the coal miners that they should be out of their homes, ready to start another day at the mine. Soon the clatter of their hob-nailed boots fill the streets as they walk to the colliery. The village slowly comes to life as the sun rises over the hills and the inhabitants individually and collectively awaken.

Now the darkness of the hills is changed to a soft green in the dappled sunlight and soon the village stirs again. Jenkins the milkman goes on his rounds, his cheerful whistle echoing through the terraced streets. The shaggy sheep move confidently among the houses, fearing neither man nor beast in the search for food.

The sun rises higher in the sky, and down Station Street walks Blodwyn Jones, an ever-present fag dropping from her lips. She goes into the co-op shop, where Mr. Davies the manager, his pinched, pale face showing disapproval at the cigarette still in her mouth, nods a greeting. Behind the cash sits her niece, Mair Williams, young and voluptuous, her dark hair up in curlers. Mair does not worry about her Medusa-like appearance, because tonight, when she goes to the pictures with Tom Harris, she will be a "curly haired lovely" – that's what Tom always calls her anyway when he lays her down in the grass behind the cemetery.

It is now past noon, and in his small rented room in Commercial Street, Dai Edwards is contemplating opening his eyes. It has been a memorable night at the Prince of Wales. His throat is raw from singing; his head aches from beer. He has a vague recollection of someone falling in the river – it was he, as his still soggy shoes on his still soggy feet inform him. Ah! But the singing, boyo, it was lovely; "Calon Lan," "Cwm Rhondda" and other hymns that are sung by the Welsh with great religious fervor in pubs, and at international rugby matches.

In the chapel house that evening the minister, Mr. Davies, is eating a frugal supper. It is his twentieth year as minister here and he contemplates his chapel's role in the village tapestry. He had long ago realized that his congregation would be made up of the young and the old. The Welsh believe in sending their children to chapel; it didn't matter if Mam and Dad never went; the children did. It isn't a bad thing really; you get grounding in religion, and you learn the hymns – this is important, because you can't learn hymns when you are drinking in the pubs, and if you go to an international match, you had better be singing or risk being mistaken for an Englishman.

As the sun disappears between the mountains, the friendly lights of the village dot the valley floor. The miners from the day shift, bathed and cleanly dressed, sit at home with

their families or sit in the Prince of Wales with their beer. Blodwyn Jones strains her eyes to read her weekly "Romance" magazine, living her life vicariously as a southern belle in New Orleans. Mair Williams, having undergone her weekly metamorphosis, is again a "curly haired lovely," as she lies in Tom's arms in the soft scented grass behind the cemetery. Down the pit Dai Edwards is cutting coal, the beer of last night seeping through his pores, as he swings his pick at the shining black coal face. In the chapel house Mr. Davies is struggling over his sermon for Sunday. His mind gropes for phrases that can reach into the hearts of his flock.

By Haydn Mason, St. John, circa 1980

This article was researched and submitted by Maggie Nixon, VWS

Aspects of Welsh Social Life in rural Wales in the early 1940s

Haydn Lloyd Davies emigrated to Australia from North Wales over 50 years ago, but he still has a strong attachment to the land of his forefathers. He has been the vice-president and patron of Cymdeithas Cymraeg Sydney (New South Wales) and a Senior Deputy Convenor of the Celtic council in Australia. He grew up in the town of Denbigh and early memories of that area, together with the time spent on his maternal grandmother's farm in Henllan, provide the basis for his review of social life in north Wales. This article has been divided into parts that will be run in successive newsletters.



PART I: There has long been a tendency to emphasize the social and cultural life of industrial Wales in contrast with rural Wales. Hence, I would like to offer a few thoughts on my perceptions of social life in North Wales in the first half of the 20th century, particularly up to the outbreak of World War II.

The area that I am referring to surrounds the town of Denbigh which was the county town of Denbighshire in the heart of the vale of Clwyd. One feature, which is repeated over many parts of rural Wales, is the many villages which form the catchment area for Denbigh, both for marketing, secondary education and social activities. These include the villages of Henllan, Llanefydd, Llanrhaeadr, Trefnant, Llansanan, Prion, Groes, Bylchau and many others. All these villages had populations varying from 100 to 400 and each was a microcosm in its own right. One interesting feature was that, with the exception of Trefnant, in all the villages mentioned the spoken language then was Welsh, whereas the spoken language on the High Street and in the shops in Denbigh (but not in the Livestock Market) was mainly English.

Language: As explained, Welsh was the language of the village and English in the town. This pattern, even in the town, however, was very dependent on the teaching in the primary schools. In the primary schools I attended, there was a strong pro-English and very anti-Welsh attitude. For sheer survival, although I was monoglot Welsh up to the age of 5 years, I had to learn English without the benefit initially of formal instruction. Welsh was entirely the language of worship unless you happened to be Episcopalian. There were no English services in any of the non-conformist chapels. The effect of this very anti-Welsh drive in the primary schools, with the exception of one girls' school, was such that when I went to Grammar School, the pupils were divided into the 'Welsh class' which studied Welsh language and literature and the 'non-Welsh' classes where Welsh was taught as a foreign language. I was one of only six boys in a class of 30, and of that only one came from the town of Denbigh – the rest of us were either from a village or a farm.

The level of primary education in rural Wales at this time was very variable. The qualifications of Primary school teachers were very variable ranging from science and arts graduates who were unable to find jobs in the secondary schools or industry to some, sadly, near-illiterates, who had drifted through the

system starting as pupil teachers and who had no tertiary training and some of whom should never been given the care of young minds. The emphasis in the primary schools was very much on the three Rs and an excessive use of the cane. Many opportunities were missed to widen and deepen the education of the pupils. There was one exception to this and that was



music. In all the primary schools that I was aware of, the emphasis on music and singing in particular was very great. A particular impetus was given to this in the late 1930s in Denbigh because of the holding of the Welsh National Eisteddfod in Denbigh in 1939 and one of the highlights was an evening performance by the children's choir, which was recruited from all the primary schools in the area. I know of at least three Primary School headmasters who were very gifted musically and who ensured that a sizeable proportion of each day was allotted to music. However, the music was not taught in depth, rather we sang innumerable Welsh airs such as *"The Ash Grove"*, *"Counting The Goats"* *"The Gipsy"* and *"The Bells of Aberdovey"*. The medium used was tonic sol-fa, no one was taught to read music at school. In sharp contrast with the backward state of the primary schools, those fortunate enough to pass the 11 plus examination to attend the secondary Grammar school were very advantaged. We were particularly lucky in Denbigh Grammar School, which, as measured by examination results and job placement, was by common consent the outstanding Grammar school of North Wales thanks to the fantastic drive, energy and commitment of the headmaster – W A Evans MC, MSc, MA. He had a firmly held belief in the work ethic and insisted on a very full and heavy academic programme and a very heavy homework schedule. This homework would include weekly essays in history, geography, Welsh and English, translations in French and Latin, laboratory work in chemistry, physics and biology and problems in arithmetic algebra, geometry and trigonometry In later

life I was particularly grateful for this background and discipline. There was, however a price paid for this intensive training and that was the neglect of Welsh. All instruction was given in English with the exception of those who, like me, chose to study Welsh Language and Literature. The only sentence of Welsh in six years of school assemblies was at the end of the list of old boys who fell in the two world wars that was read out on Armistice Day – *"Mewn Angof Ni Chant Fod"* (We Will Remember Them). The majority of graduating pupils eventually entered professions, including teaching, Holy Orders, banking and local government.

Haydn Lloyd Davies, New South Wales, Australia

That name again !

Three tourists were driving through North Wales. As they were approaching *"that town with the famous name"* they started discussing its pronunciation. The town, of course was Llanfairpwllgwyngyllgogerychwyrndrobwllllantysiliogogoch. Having argued back and forth for much of the morning, they decided to stop there for lunch. As they stood at the counter of a local restaurant, one of them asked the young server *"Before we order, could you please settle an argument for us? Would you pronounce where we are... very slowly?"* The girl looked at them strangely, leaned over the counter and said, very gently *"Burrrrrr – gerrrrrr Kinnnnnnnnng"*.

Do we appeal to you?

Without you, our members, there can be no Victoria Welsh Society. Hence, we need you to renew your 2006 membership (January-December).

If you have not already done so, please restore, refresh, or revive your membership by completing and forwarding the form on the next page.

The Board and Trustees offer thanks for your continuing support.

Cymdeithas Gymraeg Victoria Welsh Society

2006 Membership Form (Jan. – Dec.)

Name(s): _____

Address: _____

Postal Code: _____

Tel. Phone #: _____

E-mail address: _____

Amount enclosed: \$16 (single) \$24 (couple / family)

*Make cheque out to "Victoria Welsh Society" and mail to
Jen Pearson, 4277 Houlihan Place, Victoria, V8N 3T2*

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St. David's Day Banquet

To be held at the University Club, on March 4th, assembling at 5:30 p.m.

Name(s): _____

Address: _____

Postal Code: _____

Tel. Phone #: _____

E-mail address: _____

Number of people: _____ Cheque for: _____ (\$35.00/person)

*Make cheque out to "Victoria Welsh Society" and mail to
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