

THE WELSH SOCIETY OF VANCOUVER

Gymdeithas Gymraeg Vancouver

Cambrian News

Phwefror
2008

February
2008

Society Newsletter - Pylchgrawn y Gymdeithas



Christmas with Santa

CAMBRIAN HALL, 215 East 17th Ave, Vancouver B.C. V5V 1A6

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The Cambrian News

From The Editor:

After a month's trip, it has been difficult to focus again on the next newsletter! I was unable to attend the successful December events pictured here and I understand that nominations for the 2008 Executive have been postponed to the February 13th General Meeting. I trust you will all participate in guiding our Society forward. I also understand that there are condensation problems with the attic which are being addressed. A work party is meeting on the third Thursday of each month to address Hall maintenance.

During the month of December, two of our long serving members, **Margaret Airey** and **Gordon Thomas** celebrated their 90th birthdays. Our heartiest congratulations to them both!

Friday, January 25th is **St. Dwynwen's Day** celebrated in Wales, but some here defer the celebration in recognition of Robbie Burns. The Colorado Welsh Society presents a mini-festival of Welsh culture in celebration of St. Dwynwen's Day on Sat. Feb 2nd. Music, poetry, folk dance and Welsh folk traditions will be shared in a fun, participatory program.

I have received an advance copy of a short story set in Canada with a Welsh context. It is part of **Gee Williams'** forthcoming collection "Blood etc." published by Parthian. I will e-mail it to those on my list and place a few copies in the Hall. This author is well worth reading.

David Llewelyn Williams

Forthcoming Events

Wednesday, February 6th 7.30 pm
Executive Meeting

Sunday, February 10th 11.00 am
Bilingual Service and Te Bach

Wednesday, February 13th 7.30 pm
GENERAL MEETING !!!
Important! Please attend to elect the
new executive for 2008.

St. David's Day Dinner

Saturday, March 1st at 7.00 pm
Menu catered by Jordans:

Rolls and Butter

Leek Soup

Teriyaki Chicken

Roast Beef

Salmon

Dill/Feta Cheese New Potatoes

Hot Vegetables

Assorted Cheesecakes and Tortes

Fruit Plate

Tea and Coffee

Tickets at \$35 from Gaynor Evans at
604-271-3134. Please book early.

National Saint David's Day Parade

‘Nawr yn ei bumed flwyddyn, mae Gorymdaith Genedlaethol Gwyl Dewi yn mynd o nerth I nerth. Y flwyddyn diwethaf ar ddiwrnod gwaith, daeth bron i 2,000 o blant ac oedolion i ddathlu eu teurngarwch i Dewi Sant a Chymru mewn Gorymdaith ysblennydd a hynod o liwgar drwy strydoedd Caerdydd. Y flwyddyn yma, mae Dydd Gwyl Dewi, Mawrth y Cyntaf yn syrthio ar Ddydd Sadwrn felly unai byddwch yna i ymuno

a'r dathliadau neu cerwch i'r wefan i weld sut allwch chi adael neges i ddymuno pob llwyddiant i'r achlysur ac i roi cyfraniad ariannol i sicrhau ei fod yn tyfu ac yn tyfu. www.stdavidsday.com Os ydych chi yn cael eich dathliadau Dydd Gwyl Dewi eich hunain cerwch i'r wefan a dysgwch can Swyddogol yr Orymdaith sydd ar gael yn Gymraeg a Saesneg, 'Cenwch y Clychau i Dewi'. Caiff ei ganu am y drydedd flwyddyn y flwyddyn yma ac mae'n edrych fel y bydd yn llwyddiant mawr yn ysgolion Cymru gan fod Grid Cenedlaethol ar Gyfer Dysgu yn defnyddio'r gan a'i chysylltiad i'r Orymdaith fel man canolog am gynllun addysgiadol eang trwy ysgolion Cymru am Dewi Sant a'i fywyd.

Now in its fifth year, the National Saint David's Day Parade goes from strength to strength. Last year on a weekday, nearly 2,000 people, both children and adults came to celebrate their affinity to Saint David and Wales in a splendid multicoloured and musical Parade throughout the streets of Cardiff. This year, Saint David's Day, March the First falls on a Saturday so either be there to join in the fun and celebrations or go to the website to see how you can leave a message wishing it success and make a financial contribution to ensure that it grows and grows. www.stdavidsday.com If you're having your own Saint David's Day celebrations, go to the website and learn the Official Parade song, available in Welsh and English 'Ring out the bells for Saint David' will be sung for the third year this year and is set to become a big success in Welsh schools as the National Grid for Learning (NGFL) is using the song and the Parade as a central focus for an educational project throughout all Welsh schools.

Annual Membership Renewals

Name:.....Phone No.....
Address:.....
City:.....Postal Code:
e-mail.....

It would be very helpful if you would indicate whether you wish to receive a copy of the Newsletter by mail or if you are content to view the Newsletter on the website (in glorious colour!). You will then be notified by e-mail when the latest edition appears on the site.

I wish to continue to receive the Newsletter by mail (YES or NO).....

Membership Dues for 2008: Regular: \$35
Family (Member, Spouse & Children to 18): \$60
Seniors/Students: \$20
Out of Town (50 miles or more): \$20

Note that there has been no increase once again in the membership dues, but any additional donations will be gratefully received. Cheques or Money Orders should be made payable to **“THE WELSH SOCIETY OF VANCOUVER”**.

Send your renewals to: **Heather Davies, Membership Secretary, Cambrian Hall,
215 East 17th Avenue, Vancouver B.C., V5V 1A6**

The Children's Christmas Party

We had 16 children aged from 7months to 12 years and a few older teens who proved very helpful with games, crafts and carols. Santa aka Brian Granville did a superb job entertaining the little ones and handing out gifts. He worked very hard but was rewarded by the smiles on the little ones' faces.

I must thank my other helpers; Andrea, Paula, Dawn, Byron and Santa's Helpers Trevor Andy and Hilary. Last but not least, Jane for baking the gingerbread men and festive cupcakes. A good time was had by all, and we can't wait for next year!!

Gaynor Evans



Here, Jane is recognized by Santa for her good works. (Photo and front page photo by Gwyn Evans) We are all grateful to Gaynor, not only for organizing this party but also for arranging the most successful Christmas Dinner.

Christmas Dinner Photos
(Thanks to Paul Lievesley)



Aftermath of the Weekend



Jane receiving a generous donation from Grenville Thomas towards the expenses of the November Celebration (photo from Neville Thomas)



The Ceredigion group at a farewell lunch

Nadolig Llawen a Blwyddyn
Newydd Dda oddiwrth
Cymraes ac Islwyn Davies,
I chwi fel teulu a'r
Gymdeithas Gymraeg.
Happy Xmas and a prosperous
New Year to you as a family
and all at the Welsh Society in
Vancouver
Season's Greetings from Ceredigion

A MEMORABLE VISIT TO WALES

THE ARTIST WHO FOUND INSPIRATION IN A WELSH MINING VILLAGE

“I stayed here because I found all I required. I arrived, a stranger for a fortnight. The fortnight became eleven years.” These are the words of Josef Herman, OBE, RA, one of the foremost Expressionist artists of the latter half of the twentieth century. He is referring to his stay in the mining village of Ystradgynlais in the Upper Swansea Valley, where he is forever remembered as *Joe Bach*.

Herman’s arrival in Ystradgynlais was destined to be the end of one journey and the beginning of another. He was born in 1911, a Polish Jew in the Warsaw Ghetto, leaving in 1938 just ahead of the Nazi invasion. He subsequently spent some time in Brussels where the young Herman’s works were first exhibited.

While in Brussels, Herman learned that his entire family had been wiped out in the Holocaust. When the Nazis followed him to Belgium, Herman made his escape to Britain. He first lived with fellow Polish exiles in Glasgow where he quickly gained a reputation as an artist and was first inspired to depict working men and women, such as the fishermen of the Western Isles.

In 1944 Herman was invited to visit Ystradgynlais by a friend, Dai Alexander Williams, a miner and aspiring writer, who had befriended him in London. It was here, in this gritty Welsh mining village that Herman found his greatest inspiration to date and where he absorbed personal and artistic

impressions that stayed with him until his death in London in 2000.

In his autobiography *Related Twilights* Herman vividly recalls one of his first days in Ystradgynlais. He observed a group of miners walking across the bridge over the River Tawe, their heads appearing against the full body of the sun “like saints with their haloes”.

Herman later described the experience in his diary: “Every artist knows when he experiences something new, something he never experienced before ... This image of the miners on the bridge against that glowing sky mystified me for years with its mixture of sadness and grandeur, and it became the source of my work for years to come.”

Herman came to know many of the miners individually. In his art he perceived them not as downtrodden victims of a harsh industrial environment but as strong, confident individuals, full of passion and dignity. “It would be true to say that the miner is the walking monument of labour” he told the *Welsh Review* in 1946.

Ystradgynlais took him to its bosom. “You’re no stranger here,” he was told the day he arrived. “A day later I was addressed as Joe, and soon I was nicknamed *Joe Bach*,” he said later.

Herman and his wife Catriona, a fellow painter he had met in Scotland, eventually bought an old pop works which they turned into a studio. Here, amidst a row of miners’ cottages, they painted and gathered around them a wide circle of friends, many of them the miners who are forever memorialized in Herman’s drawings. Working with pen

and ink, charcoal, pastels or oils, Herman drew miners in the studio, on the street and even underground in the pits surrounding the village.

It did not take long for Herman's talent to be noticed and he became a significant influence on young Welsh artists. In 1951 he was commissioned to paint a mural in the Pavilion of the People at the Festival of Britain. The six panels, measuring twenty-nine by fourteen feet, depicted a group of miners resting above ground after their shift. Herman said of this painting: "I think it is one of my key pictures and the most important one I did in Wales." The mural is now in the Glynn Vivian Art Gallery in Swansea.

Herman left Ystradgynlais in 1955 because of ill-health and lived and travelled in sunnier climes - Andalusia, Israel, Mexico - eventually settling in London. His works are currently on display in many of the world's galleries, including London's Tate Gallery and the National Museum of Wales. In 1981 he received an OBE for his services to art and in 1991 was made an honorary member of the Royal Academy.

Herman was also honoured at the 1962 National Eisteddfod of Wales in Llanelli, where he received the Gold Medal for Fine Arts for his contributions to the development of painting in Wales. Of this award, Herman said, "This is one of the greatest moments in my life. When I first arrived in Ystradgynlais in that summer of 1944, I had no idea how much Wales would be tied up with the further fortunes of my life and art... What more can I say? *Diolch yn Fawr.*"

In 2004 friends and admirers of the artist established the Josef Herman Art Foundation Cymru, whose aim is to promote interest in the artist's work and to encourage arts education initiatives in the area. One of its many distinguished patrons is the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. Rowan Williams, who is himself a native of Ystradgynlais.

"The miner is the man of Ystradgynlais" wrote Herman in 1945. Today, with all the mines in the area closed, the miner is long gone. Josef Herman captured in his art a relatively brief moment in the history of the South Wales valleys, when coal was king. The strength and dignity of the Welsh coal miner is preserved for ever in the work of an artist who experienced unbelievable adversity and found refuge and inspiration in a small Welsh mining village. *Joe Bach* came for a fortnight and became part of the village's history.

Eifion Williams

Editor's Note

Somewhat to my regret, I find that the National Museum of Wales, St. Fagans, has discontinued the E-Steddfod for 2008 so one more literary competition is gone together with our recently initiated tradition of reading our entries on St. David's Day, culminating in the Crowning of the Bard. Under these circumstances, it seemed to me most appropriate to print Eifion's beautiful entry in last year's competition. This year, St. David's Day falls on a Saturday so no separate celebration is required. Do remember to book early for the Dinner with Gaynor Evans to allow her to determine the numbers attending.

D.L.I.W.

In the Year 1500

The next time you are washing your hands and complain because the water temperature isn't just how you like it, think about how things used to be.

Here are some facts about the 1500's:

Most people got married in June because they took their bi-annual bath in May, and still smelled pretty good by June. However, they were starting to smell, so brides carried a bouquet of flowers to hide the body odor. Hence the custom today of carrying a bouquet when getting married.

Baths consisted of a big tub filled with hot water. The man of the house had the privilege of the nice clean water, then all the other sons and men, then the women and finally the children. Last of all the babies. By then the water was so dirty you could actually lose someone in it. Hence the saying, Don't throw the baby out with the bath water.

Houses had thatched roofs-thick straw - piled high, with no wood underneath. It was the only place for animals to get warm, so all the cats and other small animals (mice, bugs) lived in the roof. When it rained it became slippery and sometimes the animals would slip and fall off the roof. Hence the saying: It's raining cats and dogs

There was nothing to stop things from falling into the house. This posed a real problem in the bedroom where bugs and other droppings could mess up your nice clean bed. Hence, a bed with big posts and a sheet hung over the top afforded some protection. That's how canopy beds came into existence.

The floor was dirt. Only the wealthy had something other than dirt. Hence the saying: dirt poor. The wealthy had slate floors that would get slippery in the winter when wet, so they spread thresh (straw) on floor to help keep their footing. As the winter wore on, they added more thresh until, when you opened the door, it would all start slipping outside. A piece of wood was placed in the entranceway. Hence a threshold at the doorway.

(Getting quite an education, aren't you?)

Sometimes they could obtain pork, which made them feel quite special. When visitors came over, they would hang up their bacon to show off. It was a sign of wealth that a man could bring home the bacon. They would cut off a little to share with guests and would all sit around and chew the fat.

Bread was divided according to status. Workers got the burnt bottom of the loaf, the family got the middle, and guests got the top, or the upper crust.

Lead cups were used to drink ale or whisky. The combination would sometimes knock the imbibers out for a couple of days. Someone walking along the road would take them for dead and prepare them for burial. They were laid out on the kitchen table for a couple of days and the family would gather around and eat and drink and wait and see if they would wake up. Hence the custom of holding a wake.

And that's the truth.. Now, whoever said History was boring !!!
(Thanks to Jeff Owen for this article)

Alan Jones to Visit



Alan Jones, a figure much missed on the Vancouver Welsh scene, is coming to town soon on a speaking engagement. His many friends and admirers will be delighted to hear that superb, sonorous

voice of his resounding once more in the Red Dragon at the Cambrian Hall. Alan and Tima moved to Princeton to run a brisk business at their own motel some three years ago. It does, however, constrain their movement so, sadly, Tima will not be accompanying Alan on this visit.

It is planned that Alan will address the **Dylan Thomas Circle on Friday, February 22 at 7:30 pm.** He is exceptionally well versed in the life and works of Dylan and Alan will be reading and analyzing a few of Dylan's poems. These will be interspersed with some projected visuals.

PS We are sure Alan, now bearded, will also be lured to entertain us on the piano.

Everyone who is interested is welcome to attend - a donation of \$5 is requested to cover costs.

Further info : 604 294 4332
nkthomas@shaw.ca