

THE WELSH SOCIETY OF VANCOUVER

Mehefin
2006

June
2006

Cymdeithas Gymraeg Vancouver

Cambrian News

Society Newsletter - Fylchgrawn y Gymdeithas



Dyffryn Peirioŷ Valley (a fu/ysteryear)

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VANCOUVER

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The Cambrian News

From The Editor:

I am grateful to Lynne Fox for the pictures of the Ceiriog Valley and to Nerys Haqq for sending the interesting insights on one of my favourite films *The Englishman who went up a Hill and came down a Mountain*. Eifion Williams, John Cann and Mary Lewis all contributed and the Bagillt Chair story came from the Victoria Welsh Society newsletter.

In my previous report on the E-Steddfod, I omitted to mention a third success by our members: D. Sylvia Griffiths who received second place for the following sentences of words all beginning with the letter B:
Blodwen beset by bunions, bought broad, black, boots.
Blodwens bunions became blistered.
Blodwen burned blasted boots,
Blissfully Blodwen became barefoot.

Our congratulations to Sylvia! Of the five overseas winners this year, we had three!

David Llewelyn Williams

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Friday, May 26 @ 8.00 pm Ryerson United Church, 2195 West 46th Ave., Vancouver
VWMC Farewell Concert with the Tour Repertoire prior to their Silver Anniversary Tour to Boston and Atlantic Canada

Wednesday, June 7 @ 7.30 pm
Executive Meeting in the Cambrian Hall.

Sunday, June 11 @ 11.00 am
Church Service followed by Te Bach

Wednesday, June 14 @ 7.30 pm
General Meeting in the Cambrian Hall

The Visit to the Yellow Point Lodge

The first time I won a prize was in 1952 when I correctly guessed name of the conductor of a band. Eric Winston!

The prize was a box of chocolates. The next time I won anything was in 2005 when my ticket was drawn in the 'Leaky Roof' raffle. The prize: two days at the Yellow Point Lodge for two people with all meals included. Eirlys Ann Thomas had solicited this prize from the owner of the lodge so she delivered the package to our home and a month later Art and I set off on our trip.

We went by car and took the Horseshoe Bay ferry to Nanaimo and headed south. Soon we were traveling through 'Cottage Country' which reminded us of many happy years traveling a similar route from Winnipeg to our cottage. Half an hour later we reached the entrance and drove through woodland to this grand old house situated on a rocky promontory on Yellow Point with grassy slopes on the north side leading to the beach. The lodge is owned and run by Richard Hill, the son of the builder and is very well maintained. It runs on the line of a cruise ship with fixed times for meals and a set menu. The 'package' included breakfast, lunch and dinner of outstanding quality, served in the large dining room. As if this wasn't enough, there was morning coffee and afternoon tea and dainties which guests could enjoy out on the patio. There were comfortable garden chairs in quiet corners in the grass around the lodge where you could read or just contemplate and look at the sea. The place has an aura of peace and relaxation and it is amazing to realize that it is fully booked ahead year round and when

checking out, guests automatically book for 'same time next year'.

I thank everyone who participated in the raffle as our roof is now repaired, and thanks to Eirlys Ann, I have found a place not far from home which is a piece of heaven.

Mary Lewis

The Vancouver Welsh Society Annual Golf Tournament

When: Saturday, July 15, 2006
(1st Tee-off 1.14 pm)

Where: Poppy Estate Golf Course,
3834, 248th St., Aldergrove
Tel. 604-856-1181

Cost: \$65 (Green Fee, Dinner & Prizes)

Competitions: Men's Low Gross, Low Net, Long Drive, KP; Ladies' Low Gross, Low Net, Long Drive, KP.
Overall: Fewest Putts.
The tournament will also feature the **Annual North vs. South Tourney.**

Dinner: Marinated Sirloin Steak **or** Chicken Cordon Bleu, Baked Potato and Toppings, Caesar Salad, Bean Salad, Assorted Pickle and Vegetable Platter, Black Forrest Cake, Coffee **or** Tea.

To register please contact either Tecwyn Roberts (604-464-2760) or Gwyn Evans (604-271-3134) and indicate your dinner choice. Last year there was a conflict with the Dylan Thomas Outing and also with participants who attended the Eryri Eisteddfod. We hope this year more members will be able to support our Society's longstanding event.

Welsh Immigrant Who Built a Department Store Chain

One of the early benefactors of the Vancouver Welsh Society was Chris T.A. Spencer, whose name appears on the cornerstone of our 76-year old Cambrian Hall. He was the long-term president of the Vancouver branch of David Spencer Ltd., a chain of department stores with branches throughout British Columbia. He established the Vancouver store in 1907 in modest premises on Hastings Street in downtown Vancouver. After a series of expansions, the Spencer Building eventually occupied the entire city block bounded by Hastings, Seymour, Cordova and Richards Streets. The Spencer's store was a popular shopping venue for Vancouverites until the chain was sold to Eaton's in 1948. Today it is part of Simon Fraser University's Harbour Centre downtown campus.



THE SPENCER BUILDING

The Spencer family was always mindful of its Welsh heritage. According to one Welsh Society member, several of the Society's functions were held in the elegant upper floor restaurant of the Spencer's store in the 1930's. The life of David Spencer, Chris's father, is a classic immigrant success story. He was born in 1837 on a farm near St. Athan, in the gentle rolling countryside of the Vale of Glamorgan in South Wales, where his family had farmed for generations. As a youngster he worked as an apprentice in a draper's shop and also served as a lay preacher in the Bridgend and Cowbridge diocese of the Wesleyan Methodist Church. These two formative influences - merchandising and religion - stayed with him for the rest of his life.

In 1862 David Spencer, along with many of his contemporaries, decided to head for the Cariboo, heeding newspaper stories of vast riches to be made in the goldfields. He arrived in Victoria as the gold fever was waning and the little town was filled with disappointed miners and various hangers-on hoping to profit from the gold rush.

Abandoning all thoughts of mining for gold, David decided to open a book store, later followed by a dry goods store, at first in partnership with another entrepreneur, and eventually on his own. The first David Spencer department store opened on Government Street in Victoria in 1878 and proved to be a very profitable business. Branches were later opened in other BC towns such as Nanaimo, Chilliwack and New Westminster.

David Spencer Ltd. eventually expanded into other businesses, including ranches in the interior of B.C. and the Victoria Times newspaper. The family became prominent in Victoria society and for many years occupied a mansion in the Rockland area, just down the street from Government House and Craigdarroch Castle, the home of another Vancouver Island entrepreneur, Robert Dunsmuir. The Spencer family later donated the house to the City of Victoria and today it houses the Victoria Art Gallery.

Apart from his business interests David also held firmly to his Methodist beliefs, taught Sunday School, conducted a church choir and was a leading member of the Temperance Society, which campaigned for the prohibition of alcohol. A year after he arrived in Victoria he married fellow Sunday School teacher Emma Lazenby, an immigrant from Yorkshire who was as devout a Methodist as her husband.

When David Spencer decided to open a branch in Vancouver, Chris was given responsibility for the store. He eventually became President of the David Spencer Ltd. chain of stores and was also a director of several other companies, including a bank and a life insurance company.

Chris Spencer, always affectionately known to his employees as Mr. Chris, was one of Vancouver's most prominent citizens in the first half of the twentieth century and used his wealth and prominence to benefit the community. He served as President of the Board of Trade and was instrumental in the formation of the Vancouver Welfare Federation, later called the Community Chest. He was also a founding member

of the Vancouver Art Gallery and the Vancouver Symphony. Inheriting his father's religious beliefs, Chris was an active member of Ryerson United Church in Kerrisdale and was also involved in the operation of Union College on the UBC campus. During the Second World War he headed the National War Savings Campaign in B.C. and was decorated with the C.B.E. (Commander of the British Empire).

The University of British Columbia was a major beneficiary of Chris Spencer's generosity. He was involved with the University from its beginning and was a member of the Board of Governors from 1921 to 1935. Before his death in 1953 he established the Chris Spencer Foundation to provide financial assistance to enable worthy students to attend UBC and to assist organizations devoted to the service of young people. The life of Chris Spencer is perhaps best summed up in the words of the President of the University of British Columbia at a ceremony awarding him an honorary Doctor of Laws degree in 1949:

“All who knew Mr. Chris are the richer for the experience. Many who could not know him will yet benefit from his faith in the future of British Columbia and in the young people who will live here.”

The Cambrian Hall exists as a symbol of the generosity of men like Chris Spencer who valued their Welsh heritage while at the same time making an inestimable contribution to the prosperity and future growth of British Columbia.

Eifion Williams
(from his Celtic Connection article)

THE ENGLISHMAN WHO WENT UP A HILL BUT CAME DOWN A MOUNTAIN

This letter by Ed Sullivan of Visalia, California appeared in *Professional Surveyor*, Nov./ Dec. 1998, discussing the whimsical movie (and book) *The Englishman Who Went up a Hill but Came down a Mountain*.

The story, which concerned Welsh villagers building up the local mountain to the required 1000 feet so that English surveyors who had previously measured it and called it a hill would record it as a mountain, purportedly was based upon a true incident. I was going to Wales in July 1998 and decided it would be interesting to locate the village, find the mountain and climb it.

Ffynnon Garw was a fictional name. The real village is Taff's Well (Ffynnon Taf in Welsh), and the mountain is Garth Mountain. Writer/Director Christopher Monger was born in Taff's Well and had heard the story from his grandfather and other villagers. (The filming of the movie was not made at Taff's Well. That area, near Cardiff, was too built up to portray village life in 1917. The actual filming was done in North Wales at Llanrhaeadr-yn-Mochnant, located 10 miles west of Oswestry.)

Garth Mountain and Taff's Well are located six miles northwest of Cardiff. I visited the library in Taff's Well. The librarian was both interested and helpful. She gave me a copy of the book and a copy of the only large-scale map available, which was a 1921 edition of the Ordnance survey of the area. Following the librarian's directions, I climbed the mountain. It was an easy climb because a road went part way up.

At the top there clearly was a mound of dirt, and on top of the mound was a concrete marker that appeared to be a surveyor's triangulation station.

In some ways, the book was more interesting and satisfactory than the movie because the book could include more details. The movie never shows any actual measurements being taken of the mountain. However, the book describes three successive measurements of the mountain. First, the surveyors used a clinometer and stepped-off distances, from which the elevation was calculated. They acknowledged this method was lacking in accuracy. In the second they used barometers. This was less than successful because a low-pressure front flowed through the area, causing the base barometer to change while the observing barometer was carried to the top. The third was made by triangulation with two nearby peaks for which the elevation was known. I wonder how accurate that was.

The villagers were suspicious of the English surveyors. One villager asks, "I don't see that it's possible. How will they measure it?" The other responds, "And what would they be doing with it once they've got it?" The first one responds, "By God, that's the worry of it." "The English come only when they want something."

The Reverend Jones speculated in his mind on the philosophy and practice of map-making. The most innocent maps were concerned with helping one from place to place. The English already had those - they'd found a way here hadn't they? No, they didn't need new maps for

that. The more the Reverend pondered the subject the more he concluded that maps, by and large, were made for less than altruistic purposes: maps were made to define the borders of property, more for reasons of exclusion than inclusion. Maps were to measure properties for taxation. Maps were made to define borders and thus became more and more important in times of war. Moreover, he had heard that these men, these Englishmen, were from His Majesty's Ordnance Survey. Apart from 'His Majesty' there was another term in that title the Reverend didn't like: ordnance. Wasn't that a synonym for

bombs and ammunition? The more the Reverend thought about it the more suspicious he became.

In the end the villagers prevailed; they delayed the departure of the surveyors and raised the mountain. It was a good book and a good movie. Monger, in the epilogue to the book, says that about five years after the event there was a new edition of the map, which showed "Ffynnon Garw Mountain - 1002 feet." (According to the latest Ordnance Survey covering Cardiff and Bridgend, the height of Garth Hill is now given as 307 meters (1007 feet)!)

The Bagillt Chair



The Trustees of the Victoria Welsh Society recently received a formal request from members of the Historical Club of Bagillt, Flintshire, to consider giving them the bardic chair currently in their possession; the word "*Bagillt*" is engraved on the shield that forms the chair's backrest. As was the custom, the

chair had been made in anticipation of being awarded to the winning poet in an Eisteddfod that was held in Bagillt in 1889. However, the chair was not awarded since no poem was deemed to be of sufficient merit. It is not clear how the chair became part of the exhibits in Craigdarroch Castle. When the Province assumed responsibility for the Castle, the chair was put up for sale and was bought by the Society.

At a Board meeting on April 4th, trustees gave full consideration to the request and, in a unanimous vote, agreed that the chair be returned to its place of origin. The proposal by the Historical Club of Bagillt involved receiving the chair on behalf of the village and ensuring that it would be safeguarded and displayed in perpetuity within Saint Mary's Church. Also, assurances were given that the transference would not involve the Society in any financial cost. The relocation of this significant historic artefact will allow it to be viewed by many people in a pleasant setting - something that cannot be achieved in Victoria.

What a Night!

Saturday evening, May 6th, 2006, was memorable! Who would have thought that our heritage Cambrian Hall would contribute to the success of the tourist industry in Vancouver, the world's #1 desirable city-of-residence?

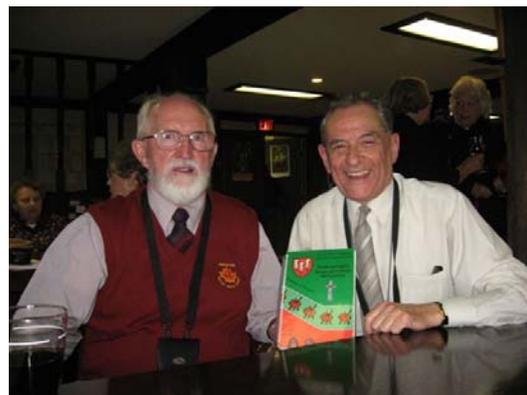
Would a group of over 40 Welsh tourists from South and West Wales be interested in seeing the Red Dragon pub at its swinging best? It seems that almost all of the nearly 50 travelers thought it was a good idea. What age group did they belong to? Would they rather visit the "Melt-Down" event going on upstairs in the hall? Was there enough to drink? What could we offer, to keep their interest? Would there be enough local members out to impress and bring out the *hiraeth*, the talk of "old times" and "back home"? You needn't have worried one bit!



The large group of visitors soon became a myriad of small groups, each with a Vancouver Welsh Society member as a nucleus. Where are you from? Siarad Cymraeg? Ti 'nabod? How long iw been out yer in Canada? Jane found a tourist that had been her near neighbour years ago. Del found a class mate from years ago in Gwendraeth Grammar School. How about some Welsh cakes? Bara Brith? Te? Siwgr, Ilaeth?

"Anyone here play the piano?" from Gwyn Evans. "You play the organ

where? Cwmbach near Aberdare? Nefoedd, I'm from there! Ti 'nabod....?"



And the singing was under way. Out came the Gymanfa Ganu hymn books. Everyone singing yn y Gymraeg, a tipyn bach o Saesneg. Words not in the books, "Seven Eleven Songs," seven words repeated eleven times.



What? Eleven o'clock already? Where did the time go? Back to the hotel, the Waterfront Renaissance, to be up at 6 AM for the ferry to Victoria.

We didn't run out of wine or beer, in fact only enough sold to be a telltale bulge in the financial records to show when those tourists came. A big thanx to Gwyn and Gaynor and their much applauded (by the tourists, too) courier son, Gareth, for the idea and the logistics of the get together. Thanx too to all the Cymry who rallied. Do it again? Quick as a milgi! And nefoedd, make sure you're there next time!

John Cann