

THE WELSH SOCIETY OF VANCOUVER  
Cymdeithas Gymreig Vancouver

*Cambrian News*

**Mis Medi 2021**

**September 2021**

*Society Newsletter - Cylchgrawn y Gymdeithas*



Corn Dolly (Photo courtesy Brian Jones)

CAMBRIAN HALL, 215 East 17<sup>th</sup> Ave, Vancouver B.C. V5V 1A6

## VANCOUVER WELSH SOCIETY

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#### **Vice-President**

**Paul Lievesley**

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**David Llewelyn Williams**

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#### **Social Events Committee:**

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**Gaynor Evans (Secretary)**

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## *The Cambrian News*

### **From the Editor:**

#### **Welcome Back!**

Although we aren't out of the woods yet, we are at least able to start planning - with caution and in accordance with the COVID guidelines still in place - events and celebrations at which we can all get together again! Sadly, the garden party has had to be postponed, but we are looking forward to scheduling a similar event after the 7 September COVID "state of play" announcement from the BC Government.

The results of the limerick competition are in! The winning entries can be found on page thirteen.

One of the groups that has continued to meet during the summer is the **Red Cardigans**. Focused on Welsh music and dance, the group, led by **Paul Lievesley** and **Brian Jones**, has been meeting at the beach. For information, contact Paul Lievesley at [flyingcustard@gmail.com](mailto:flyingcustard@gmail.com)

In May the Society lost a beloved member, past-president and newsletter editor, **David Llewelyn Williams**. David's friendship, leadership and participation in the activities of the society will be greatly missed. A tribute to David by **Eifion Williams** can be found on page five.

I've very much enjoyed my six years as editor of the newsletter but feel it's time for me to hand on the "pen." If you're interested in taking over the editorship, please let the President **Lynn Owens-Whalen** know. It's a great way to volunteer for the Society.

Ruth Baldwin  
[dysgwrcymraeg375@gmail.com](mailto:dysgwrcymraeg375@gmail.com)

## Forthcoming Events

All events and activities of the Vancouver Welsh Society were cancelled or postponed during lockdown. However, plans to reactivate activities are in the works. Please continue to consult the Vancouver Welsh Society website [www.welshsociety.com](http://www.welshsociety.com) for current information.

## Typical Monthly Events

*This list is for information only! All events have been cancelled or postponed until further notice. Please consult the Society Website for updated information as activities are reintroduced.*

**Sundays:** 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of the month: Bilingual Church Service. The exception is in November when the service is on the Sunday of the Welsh weekend.

**Mondays:** 1<sup>st</sup> Monday of the month for Board Members only: Executive Meeting at 7:00 pm.

**Mondays:** 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Mondays of the month the Red Cardigan Folk Club meets at 7:00 pm.

**Mondays:** 3<sup>rd</sup> Monday of the month: The Welsh speaking group meets at 10:30 am.

**Mondays:** 4<sup>th</sup> Monday of the month: Volunteer working party: 10:00 am until 3:30 pm.

**Wednesdays:** 2<sup>nd</sup> Wednesday of the month: The Book Club meets at 12:00 noon. **The Book Club is meeting on Zoom during the pandemic. The book for September is *A God in Ruins*, by Kate Atkinson. Please email for details: [gillianrogers67@gmail.com](mailto:gillianrogers67@gmail.com)**

**Wednesdays:** 3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesday of the month: The Genealogy Group meets from 10:30 am – 12:30 pm in the Red Dragon.

**Thursdays: Welsh Language lessons:** The schedule varies and details are shown [here](#).

**General Meetings:** The dates of the General Meetings will be decided upon by the executive. The **AGM** for year #1 is held in February of year #2, e.g. the 2021 AGM will be held in February 2022.

## *Vancouver Orpheus Male Choir*

Please refer to the choir's website for information: <http://vancouverorpheus.org>

## *Vancouver Welsh Men's Choir*

Please refer to the choir's website for information: <https://vwmc.ca/>

## Submissions by Members

### Harvest Celebrations



By Brian Jones, *aka* Strawboss

Anon the fields are getting clear,  
And glad sounds hum in labourer's ear  
When children halloo "Here they come!"  
and run to meet the Harvest Home . . .

So said **John Clare**, a poet and the son of a farm labourer back in the 1800s, in his poem "September." What Clare was recording in verse was one of the last of the harvest celebrations that had been practiced in agricultural communities since food production was first invented. It is known that wheat and barley were growing wild in the Near and Middle East around 8000BC. Early "farmers" figured out that these crops could be used for fodder for animals and food for everyone. Nothing was known of seed germination so it was thought that the propagation of the crop was ruled by a goddess. This belief entailed the creation of rituals to make certain the goddess remained kindly and ensured a good crop (and, more importantly, a crop) every year. The spread of agriculture meant that rituals would also be spread and would remain an essential part of "getting in" the harvest until recent times.

### **Gaseg Fedi**

Fast forward to Wales in the mid 1880s. **Jonathon Ceredig Davies** observed and recorded traditions surrounding *Y Gaseg Fedi*. *The Gaseg Fedi* (harvest mare) was a small quantity of the last corn, which was left standing in the field at the end of the harvest and tied up carefully. There was great excitement and much amusement when the last standing was reached as there was a good deal of fun in connection with cutting the mare. Each reaper in his turn was allowed to throw his sickle at the corn, from a distance of about fifteen or twenty yards, until it was cut. The most unskilful were allowed to try first but at last someone would succeed in cutting it down amidst cheers. It was customary in some places, especially in the North of Cardiganshire, for one of the men, after cutting it down, to take the mare to a neighbouring farm, where the harvest had not been completed, and where the reapers would still be busy at work.

All this seems like harmless entertainment and a nice way to end what was then a lot of backbreaking work before the introduction of modern farm machinery put a stop to that. The goddess idea does not seem to feature in the modern process because Christianity has intervened and discouraged religious practices that had come to be considered pagan. But what seems important is that the community got together to ensure that the harvest was gathered in. It was quite common for everyone in the community to help and to encourage each other to get it done. There was no Safeway store just down the road; everyone knew the results of a poor harvest or no harvest at all: starvation.

By the mid 1800s, farm machinery had been introduced that ensured a speedy harvest and, with the Industrial Revolution gathering speed, there were fewer folk in rural areas to be kept up the harvest practices, so they began to die out. The last recorded practice of such rituals where I came from on the Welsh border was observed by **Georgina Frederica Jackson** in 1856. This was in Shropshire (which borders the old county of Montgomeryshire) and this time the gonder's (gander's) neck was the last of the crop to be cut down by the reapers. It was then carried in triumph to a place of honour in the farmhouse to be used again in springtime, probably as the seed corn for the next planting.

### **Corn Dollies**

I was raised on a small farm and my grandparents had come from mid Wales to the Welsh border sometime in the late 1880s. My mother remembered some stories, passed on to her by her mother. She had a hazy recollection of a harvest story and she encouraged me to take up the hobby of corn dolly making. At the time I was quite young and needed a bit of pocket money so it seemed a good idea, but then it blossomed

into a more satisfying way of celebrating my farming roots and paying respect to my long line of farming ancestors.

Corn dollies are made from the last (and best) of the crop and are a reminder of the importance of the old harvest customs even though now they are just made for decoration. As with the old harvest customs, each geographical area of the UK had its own designs and many other designs are to be found in all the places of the world where corn (and also wheat, oats, barley and rye) are grown.

The term "dolly" is meant to describe the "idol" so there is still a link to our pagan past. So what does it all mean? Is there something to be "gleaned" from learning about the past rituals that helped to ensure the success of the harvest? Well, food still has to appear on the table and so there always has to be a harvest somewhere and, now, in the time of climate change, this is even more relevant. The up-to-date term is "food security," so perhaps now more than ever this is likely to become a hot topic.

For more information on corn dollies and the work I still do, check out [strawboss.ca](http://strawboss.ca) on the wonderful new internet thing (or just send me an email on [bdilljones@shaw.ca](mailto:bdilljones@shaw.ca).)

**The Red Cardigans** riding into the sunset,  
instruments blazing!



What could be nicer on a fine evening than playing or listening to Welsh music at the beach and watching a beautiful sunset?



## DAVID LLEWELYN WILLIAMS

### A Tribute by Eifion Williams

With the passing of Dr. David Llewelyn Williams on Sunday, May 23, the Vancouver Welsh Society lost one of its most active and influential members.

Through the many events he organized and the many positions he held in the Society, David Llewelyn constantly demonstrated his love for the language, history and culture of Wales. His

presentations were always enthusiastically delivered, while he rarely concealed his personal and emotional involvement in the Welsh subjects he chose to discuss.

David Llewelyn was born in Prestatyn, North Wales into a family that valued the importance of learning and education. Welsh Society members who came to know him well in later years admired and respected him as an enthusiastic lover of Welsh poetry and traditions and for his active participation in Society events. Few probably realized that he was also a brilliant and highly respected academic.

David Llewelyn gained his undergraduate degree at Bangor University, followed by a doctorate from England's prestigious Cambridge University. In 1960 he won a National Research Council of Canada Postdoctoral Fellowship at the University of British Columbia, eventually becoming a full professor and Head of the Physics Department.

He later became Associate Dean of Graduate Studies and served on the UBC Senate for 19 years. In 1994 he was awarded the president's Service Award of Excellence. While at UBC, David Llewelyn became internationally known for his research, academic papers and extensive contributions to international conferences.

Following his arrival in Vancouver in 1960, David Llewelyn renewed his friendship with **John Pritchard** and **Jane Byrne**, who had both known him while all three were students in Bangor and who were also at the time attending UBC. The three friends became enthusiastic members of the Vancouver Welsh Society, each beginning over fifty years of active participation in the Society.

David Llewelyn's main contributions to the Welsh Society followed his retirement in 2002. From 2002 to 2015 he was editor of the Welsh Society newsletter, *The Cambrian*

*News*, to which he contributed many articles on Welsh cultural and historical events while also chronicling the Society's activities.

David Llewelyn always delighted in welcoming visitors from Wales, especially those who shared his interest in Welsh history and literature. He served as President of the Vancouver Welsh Society from 2014 to 2016, a position he filled with dignity and dedication.

Many Society members will remember David for sponsoring and participating in specific events such as film shows and talks on Welsh subjects that reflected his interests. He also frequently presented the *sgwrs* at the Society's monthly bilingual church service, always choosing favourite subjects that he delivered with great enthusiasm and usually with great feeling.

David Llewelyn also enjoyed reading poetry and adjudicating poetry competitions. He was well-known to regular attendees at the North American Festival of Wales (NAFOW) for his poetry readings and adjudications and rarely missed attending the annual Festivals held in various North American cities. The NAFOW Eisteddfod now awards David Llewelyn Williams Poetry Prizes "to honour the memory of a great friend and huge contributor to the NAFOW Eisteddfod."

Perhaps the most popular events organized by David Llewelyn were the annual St. Dwynwen's celebration nights. St. Dwynwen is celebrated in Wales as the Welsh goddess of love and David organized the annual celebration around this theme. Following his brief summary of the story of Dwynwen's thwarted love, David Llewelyn would distribute individual "love" cards to audience members, followed by music and readings by individual participants. Many members will remember those St. Dwynwen night occasions when, at David

Llewelyn’s own request, **Sharon McGinty-Burrell** would sing “The Rose” as a loving tribute to his late wife Uta, who passed away in 2012.

David Llewelyn is survived by two sons, **Marc** (Joyce) and **Nicolas** (Jennifer) and three grandchildren, **Hugh, Dylan** and **Nova**. He was also blessed in his last years by his close friendship with Welsh Society member **Pat Morris**, who aided and comforted him in his last few days and was by his side at the time of his passing.

After the current COVID restrictions are lifted, the Welsh Society plans to dedicate one of its monthly religious services to the memory of David Llewelyn.

In conclusion, below are a few lines from David Llewelyn’s favourite Welsh poet, **R.S. Thomas** who, although he wrote in English, was, like David Llewelyn himself, a passionate admirer of the Welsh landscape, the Welsh people and their native culture.

One night of tempest I arose and went  
Along the Menai shore on dreaming bent;  
The wind was strong, and savage swung the  
  tide,  
And the waves blustered on Caernarfon side.

But on the morrow, when I passed that way,  
On Menai shore the hush of heaven lay;  
The wind was gentle and the sea a flower  
And the sun slumbered on Caernarfon  
  tower.

(from the poem “Night and Morning” by  
R.S. Thomas)

### **UBC Flag-Lowering**

On 7 June 2021, the BC, Musqueam and UBC flags (at the North Plaza of the Life Building) were lowered in remembrance of **David Llewelyn Williams**. Professor Emeritus David Llewelyn Williams passed

away on May 23, 2021. Dr. Williams taught in the Department of Physics and Astronomy for over 25 years and was inducted into the Quarter Century Club in 1996.

<https://ceremonies.ubc.ca/category/flag-lowering-archives/page/2/>

### **A Tale of a Nantyyffyllon Coal Miner**

*(Nant y ffyllon is a village 1 mile north of Maesteg, Glamorgan)*

**By Ronald Jenkins Jr.**, great-grandson of John E. Jenkins & Hannah Snow.

Born : Caerau, Maesteg.

Fifth Generation Coal Miner.

#### **John Edward Jenkins (1876-1906)**

is recorded on the Census of 1881 and 1891 as living at No.1 Bangor Terrace, Nantyyffyllon. His father **Evan Jenkins** (head of household) was a collier. In 1898 Evan Jenkins, whilst working on the coal face at North Navigation Colliery **Caerau**, lifting a heavy stone, suffered a ‘stroke’ and died soon after.

Eldest son, **John Edward Jenkins**, likely commenced his work as a coal miner at age thirteen. During the first years of the Twentieth Century, recruiting agents were in Maesteg seeking to sign up skilled colliers to emigrate to the British Dominion of south-western Alberta, Canada. With the newly constructed Canadian Pacific Railroad connecting Canada from the East Coast to Vancouver in the West, rich reserves of coal had been discovered along the railway in the Crowsnest Pass of the Rocky Mountains and a mining community had been established. Skilled miners were in great demand by the mining Company.

In 1905 John Edward Jenkins, aged twenty-nine, married **Hannah Jane** (Snow) and became a father to two small children (Polly and Sydney). John was, by accounts,

a strapping fit man. Confident of his skill and prowess as an experienced collier, he took a courageous decision, signed up with the agents to emigrate to the coal mines of the Crowsnest Pass, with the intention becoming established in Canada, then sent for his wife Hannah and the children to follow for a new and better life.

It is likely that his passage via ship and train journey would have been paid by the agency as an inducement for the skilled colliers they required to take the journey Westwards. *(It is known that a steam packet ship regularly took a six- week round voyage from Bristol via Cork, to the eastern coast Canada and passengers returned by train and boat all the way!)*

With records from the archives of **The United Mineworkers of America** (Union) and records from the (Coal Company Accounts) and Canadian archives, we (his family) learned that John Jenkins was working at the French-owned **Lille coalmine** and living in the mining town. On the sixth November 1905, **John Edward Jenkins** suffered a serious injury at work. A cutting from **The Edmonton Bulletin** Newspaper dated fifteenth November 1905, provides a revealing description of the accident and the condition of the victim:

*“Having completed ‘boring’ operations with his partner in the (stall) slope, it is the case that John Jenkins had hastily ‘hitched a ride’ on the mine car haulage being hoisted ‘up’ the No.1 Mine slope, to fetch explosives. His head came into contact with a low timber beam roof support. This caused John to be knocked backward, thus ‘breaking his back.’”*

Note that in those days, men carried only a flame safety lamp to illuminate the great darkness. In such circumstances, John would not see the low beam.

John was taken to a hospital in the town of Frank, under the care of **Dr. Thomas O’Hagan**. Jenkins was described as, “A fine specimen of physical manhood, rendered helpless for the remainder of his life.” Today he would be diagnosed a paraplegic. It is impossible to imagine the anguish and worry the man suffered. He died on the sixteenth January 1906. We have recently learned (*via Alberta historian, Mr Ian McKenzie*) that John would have been buried in the Blairmore Old Union B Cemetery, near Frank.

Perhaps via telegraph and letter, the tragic news arrived back home to his wife and family in Caerau. The despair, loss and tragedy can only be imagined. Hannah Jane Jenkins (nee Snow) later re-married a man of good character, **Richard Phillips** and had a further ten children, living in Treherne Road, Caerau. The child Polly died in infancy and Sydney (my grandfather) was brought up by his grandparents, the Snows, in Tonna Road, Caerau. Sydney also became a coalminer and was a lifelong member of the Caerau Working Men’s Club. It is probable that Sydney lived his whole life without knowing the full details as told in this story.

The tragic story and “name” of John Edward Jenkins was lost for over 100 years, but now he is found. Today his story is recorded in the archives of the Glamorgan Archive, the Crowsnest Pass Museum, Coleman, and Bellevue Mine Museum archive, Coleman, Alberta.





*Above:* **Hannah Jane Jenkins** (née Snow) the widow of John Edward Jenkins, with whom she had two children. Hannah appears in this photograph with her second husband, Richard Phillips, with whom she had ten children.

**Ed.:** We are very grateful to **Mr. Ronald Jenkins Jnr.**, great-grandson of John Edward Jenkins, for sending his fascinating article for inclusion in the Cambrian News.

## Book Reviews

Colin Hughes: *Lime, Lemon & Sarsaparilla: The Italian Community in South Wales, 1881 – 1945, 2003.* Published by Seren. 142 pp.

When I lived in Hammersmith as a child in the late 1940s and 50s, a friend of mine in the street was Peter Cattini whose parents ran a cafe in Hammersmith market. Having experienced the warmth of the Italian welcome, the quality of the food and ice cream in restaurants and cafes in Cardiff, Cardigan, Aberaeron, Aberystwyth, Wrexham, Pwllheli, et al, I have been keen to gain greater insight into why the “Italian migrants” chose to settle in the South Wales valley towns.

In an excellently written, politically balanced, well researched, and thought-provoking book, *Lime, Lemon & Sarsaparilla*, **Colin Hughes** explores the history and lifestyle of the Italian community in South Wales.

Until 1861, Italy was a collection of individual states which had their own dialects, traditions, skills and leaders. This resulted in families from villages moving together to give mutual support in their “new worlds.” Italian migrants to Wales, Scotland and England from the mid 1800s were mainly poor and uneducated and from rural regions around Parma, Genoa, Lucca and Northern Italy. Migrants to Glasgow came from the Lucca area famous for plaster

of paris statuettes. Large numbers in the Clerkenwall, Soho and Holborn areas of London came from Pordenone region, which is associated with mosaic and terrazzo work.

Colin Hughes focuses on the migrants to the South Wales valley towns from the mountaineous agricultural area around Parma and Genoa, in particular Bardi. The Bardi “enclave” included surnames such as Bracchi, Berni, Conti, Sidoli, Zanelli, Antioniazzi, Rabaiotti, and others.

The Italians from Bardi came to South Wales with a range of rural and musical skills but the key factor in their success was their enterprise and willingness to “seize the moment and opportunity” by establishing “Temperance Bars.”

The author contrasts the poverty and economic restrictions experienced by Italians in rural areas with their desire to start new lives in the developing industrial area of South Wales, in particular Pontypridd and the Valleys, Rhondda Fawr and Rhondda Fach. He details how they became members of valley communities as they developed their influence within the expanding “catering trade” and “Temperance Bars.” Italian families such as the Bracchis, Sidolis and Rabaiottis “hit on a recipe for success” by establishing “Temperance Bars,” which became the foundation for the Italian catering trade. The author discusses at length how these “Temperance bars” thrived within a Welsh culture dominated by the mainly Welsh speaking evangelical non-conformists, the “Temperance Movement” and the Sunday closing Wales Act (1881). One contributor from Bedlinog commented: “I can still visualise the warmth of the Italian shop. These bars, unique to Wales, were open all hours and, more important, gained acceptance by the “evangelical power house of non-conformism” to open on Sundays. It was not “the dreaded” mild and bitter that

flowed freely, but “lime juice and sarsaparilla.”

The author engages the reader with tales of how the outgoing, friendly Italian personalities, their entrepreneurial determination and family teamwork drove forward “rapid success” by creating warm welcoming environments and “value for money” food and drinks in “bars” that filled a social void. Undoubtedly it was the enterprise they created, rather than what they brought from Bardi, that made such an impact on the Welsh communities.

In contrast to the Irish and Jewish migrants seeking work, the Italians did not pose a threat to the employment of the Welsh “bread winners.” This was particularly pertinent in the Rhondda valley areas, such as Treorchy and Tonypany, at the time of the great slump in employment in the coalfields after 1921. In fact many of the “padrone” boys brought over from areas such as Bardi on short term “placements” based on the Italian apprenticeship model for organ grinders, went on to save enough money to open bars of their own.

Colin Hughes considers that the dispersal of the Italian bar owners and ice cream vendors around the valleys and to other parts of Wales underlines how they were openly accepted for the positive impact they had on the social life of the Welsh workers and their families. This dispersal of the families resulted in the Italians in Wales not forming concentrated Italian communities as experienced in London, Glasgow and Liverpool.

The author addresses with considerable sensitivity and frankness a dominant factor that impacted upon the attitude of the indigenous population towards the “Italian communities and families” regarding the influence of Mussolini and the fascist Blackshirt brigade on the “Italian community in Wales. Mussolini and his “followers” attempted to

transform Italian communities in Wales and Britain after 1932 into “fascist Italy” groups in an attempt to expand fascism in other countries. A key example was the London “Fascio,” a powerful influence on Italians living in London. The “fascio” stressed the obligation for all Italian families to send their children to Italian schools unless they wanted them to forget their own language and traditions. In a balanced section, Colin Hughes includes some excellent photographs of “Italian schools” in the valleys held on Saturday mornings. These “schools” illustrate the pressure put on Italian parents by the Italian Consulate in Cardiff to maintain their children’s knowledge and awareness of the Italian language and culture and by the teachers to promote fascist propaganda. **Victor Spintti**’s foreword to the the book indicates clearly that his father did not want Victor to be “indoctrinated.”

In 1939, as the Second World War became a terrible reality, Italian families were caught in the “black shirt” agenda resulting from Mussolini’s supportive links to fascism in Spain and Germany, his call for “patriotic nationalism” and the insistence of M15 that “all fascists were equally dangerous.” As a result there were many instances where Italians who had lived and worked in Wales for generations and established roots in the community had their businesses attacked or villified by “those in the community they had seen as friends.” The political outcome was that by the middle of June 1940 all males between sixteen and seventy of Italian, German or Austrian descent were interned at “camps” in areas such as Liverpool, Bury and the Isle of Man. Under pressure, Canada agreed to accept 3,000 prisoners and 4,000 internees, including 1,500 members of the “Italian Fascist Party.”

The author details the impact this action had, in particular the tragic and

devastating sinking of the *Arandora Star* ship that was torpedoed by a German U boat as it transported 1,600 male internees from Liverpool to a holding base in Canada. This tragedy resulted in 486 Italian and 175 German men deemed “lost at sea.” Many of the Italian men came from Wales and their names and towns of residence are detailed in the appendices.

In an illuminating section the author describes how the years during the second World War and up until the 1950s developed as “the heyday of the Italian cafe trade in Wales.” As the picture of Massari’s cafe in Cross Keys shows, by the 1980s the days of many Italian cafes had given way to the dawning of Chinese and Indian takeaways.

My one reservation is that Colin Hughes fails to address the willingness of the Italian migrants to learn the Welsh language. In contrast, **George Borrow**, when detailing his walking tour of Wales in 1854, notes his delight at meeting a Welsh speaking Italian in Cerrigydrudion who had learned Welsh through his work travelling around the Welsh countryside selling weather glasses and trinkets. It is worth noting that many descendants of Italian migrants in the Aberystwyth, Aberaeron, Carmarthen, Swansea, Pwllheli and Wrexham areas learnt Welsh in their communities and some have followed education in Welsh medium schools. For example, in 2020, **Stephen Varney**, a Welsh speaking scrum half from Rosehill near Cardigan, whose grandfather **Luigi Calligari** came from Begonia, opted to play for the Italian national team. Stephen is trilingual and was proud to speak on his international debut in Welsh with the referee for the game, **Nigel Owens**.

Overall, this is a sensitively written text which will give readers great insight into the positive contribution of the Italian community to social, cultural and business

life in South Wales towns and also other areas of Wales. As someone who has enjoyed on many occasions, in the late 1960s, the quality of set meals such as tomato soup, two pork chops, mash potatoes, with two veg and gravy, followed by apple tart and custard and a tea for four shillings and sixpence at the Beadon Road Italian cafe in Hammersmith, coffee at the Penguin in Aberystwyth, Conti’s ice cream in Aberaeron etc., I thank Colin Hughes for an illuminating insight into the Italian contribution to economic and social life in Wales. **Diolch yn fawr / Grazie mille.**

**Brian Davies:** *Land of Lead*, 2021.  
Published by Y Lolfa. 128 pp.

In an engaging, historically insightful and thought provoking text **Brian Davies’** *Land of Lead* takes the reader on a personal journey covering four generations of his family centred around Aberystwyth and North Ceredigion. His wealth of family connections, both maternal and paternal, are rooted in the area he calls his “bro mebyd” (area of childhood). Throughout the text, Brian Davies extols the rich cultural heritage of his “cynefin” (habitat) with warmth, emphasising that it is “unique and irreplaceable.”

Readers will gain considerable insight into the roles that members of Brian’s extended family played within key areas of historical and sociological importance, including mining, maritime, railway, agriculture, and non-conformist chapels. In addition he includes background information on family involvement in the Great War and its impact on employment in the area during the inter-war years and, to a lesser extent, the Second World War.

The text delivers considerable insight into the historical development of Aberystwyth as a “harbour town,” which attracted many to a seafaring career. In

addition, it was a market town where locals in outlying rural areas could sell produce and purchase “essentials” from a range of traders/shops. I was disappointed, as an Aber graduate, that Brian did not extol the building of Aberystwyth University in 1872 and its positive impact on the economy of North Ceredigion as a centre of academic learning and research. By the mid twentieth century it had developed as an important provider of employment opportunities. The continued expansion has driven an economic boost for retailing, housing, leisure, tourism and extensive re-development and re-furbishment of “*Yr Hen Coleg*.”

From an historical perspective the four sections of the book are well researched, providing material and letters which promote awareness and insight into issues and events which add a fresh dimension for the reader - for example, recounting the history of the schooner “Clarissa,” which was built by **John Evans** in Aberystwyth, detailing trips to Liverpool and describing the problems posed to crew members by gangs, crime and thuggery in the City.

The range of original letters and notebooks adds greatly to the story. The photographs of sixteen paintings, including the harbour and the town from Constitution Hill, add illustrative evidence to the text.

In an illuminating section on **Isaac Jenkins** (1883-1966) the importance and influence of the non-conformist Welsh chapels on life in the secluded villages is highlighted in the discussion on life in Ystumtuen. The author details how meeting in the chapel enabled “each one in their “milltir sgwar” (area) to feel part of their “bro” (neighbourhood). Isaac’s vivid description of the “course” of the Rheidol Valley Line (Y Lein Fach) from Aberystwyth to Devils Bridge highlights the beauty of the Rheidol Valley alongside the

disused lead mines and mills and the remoteness of the area. The author highlights from documents how for families in the valley, before the opening of the “Lein Fach,” life was “tough,” both physically and in terms of diet, and extremely isolated and insular in terms of its limited communication with the outside world.

The author’s description of work in the local lead mines is both insightful and in many ways depressing in terms of the suffering endured resulting from atrocious working conditions and the expectations of employers. Evidence shows that the work, for very low wages, was dangerous, hazardous to health and laborious. The author illustrates how his great grandfather was unwilling for his son to follow him down the mine and arranged for him to work as a “gwas fferm”(servant) at a farm in the area. This work was physically demanding in terms of the hours worked and the wages were “very meagre.” The “incentive” for the parents was that the bulk of the reward for the labour of the “gwas fferm” was simple accommodation in a loft over the barn and being fed “thrice daily” on a separate table alongside the owner and his family.

Young females in isolated families were sent out as “morwynion” (domestics) to live-in with families for their food and accommodation with extremely meagre wages. This employment of boys as “gwas fferm” and girls as “morwynion” enabled large poorer families to “relieve the burden of the children” on the scarcity of food and accommodation in the home.

Interestingly, my maternal grandmother, who lived with her family in a cottage near Nant-y -Moch above Ponterwyd, moved to Poplar in the East End of London aged fifteen in 1892, to work as a “morwynion.” In conversations she said the work was hard but the family provided food and the house was warm. At home in Nant y

Moch, her first language was Welsh, but at school she had to speak English. She never spoke Welsh “in service” or after marrying. The family lived in rented houses in Poplar, Bermondsey, etc., and finally East Acton, at the back of Wormwood Scrubs Prison. She had seven children and died in 1976 at the age of ninety-nine.

Readers will gain considerable insight into the lives of the Welsh speaking families in Aberystwyth and North Ceredigion, in particular the isolation and hardship faced by those working in the mining, agricultural and sea faring industries. Davies highlights the key sociological aspects of employment, poverty, and hardship alongside the positive impact of the railways, in particular “*Y Lein Fach*,” the Rheidol line, in increasing mobility for the rural families and access to goods and resources.

I was disappointed that, despite stressing the importance of “the rich cultural heritage within his *cynefin*,” and the social role of Welsh non-conformist chapels, (for example, all of a ship’s crew were Welsh speaking) Davies avoids discussing the failure of education to promote the Welsh language skills of the children. Many schools forcibly discouraged children from speaking Welsh, as in the case of my grandmother. The impact of this on the Welsh language was apparent until the 1970s .

Overall, this is an enthralling life history and is highly recommended in particular for readers who have enjoyed the beauty of Ceredigion or have family links with the area. Diolch, Brian – mae’n ardderchog!

Ed: Many thanks to **John Teifi Morris**, who wrote these insightful reviews.

## The Results of the Limerick Competition

The entries were sent to the two judges, **Dr. Don and Mrs. Elizabeth Paterson**, numbered but without the names of the writers. The judges said all the efforts were very good so they found it hard to say whether one was better than another.

### Cwmbran Category:

There were several inventive rhymes, but the judges could not resist green eggs and ham, which they thought was surely a Welsh dish! So the winner is **Paul Lievesley** for:

There was an old maid from Cwmbran,  
Who loved the sight of a pram.  
She would bill and coo  
At the little who,  
Telling tales of green eggs and ham!

For “presenting an excellent scheme to promote tourism in Cwmbran as well as turning a phrase” the runner up is **Marilyn Hames** for:

A committee was struck in Cwmbran,  
Who came up with a great master plan  
To attract far more tourists,  
Gave free parking to nudists,  
Plus fig leaves and tan from a can.

### Chirk Category:

For “a classic limerick - excellent scansion, good rhymes and a healthy dose of satire” - the winner is **Eifion Williams** for:

There was a young man from Chirk,  
Who worked as a government clerk.  
His duties were few  
Yet his salary grew  
With month-long vacations a perk.

For “upping the ante” by using both place names, the runner up is **Eifion Williams** for:

A clever young poet from Chirk  
Found limericks easy to work.  
Then he moved to Cwmbran,  
Which did him some harm,  
For his talent for rhymes went berserk.

Congratulations to the winners, Paul,  
Marilyn and Eifion, and well done all who  
entered for their very fine efforts. To the  
judges – thank you so much! Please come  
down to the Red Dragon when restrictions  
are lifted and we'll stand you both a beer  
and a bag of chips at the bar!

### Learners' Corner

Here's a limerick for learners who, like me,  
struggle with *treigladau*:

A clever young lady from Chirk  
Said she thought learning Welsh too much  
work;

With all those *futations*  
And like *bermutations*  
She felt she was *oing feserk!*

(Please don't write in to say there are typos  
in it – there aren't!)

On a beautiful summer's day, two English  
tourists were driving through Wales.  
At Llanfairpwllgwyngyllgogerych-  
wyrndrobwylllatysiliogogoch they stopped  
for lunch and one of the tourists asked the  
waitress: "Before we order, I wonder if you could  
settle an argument for us. Can you pronounce  
where we are, very, very, very slowly?"  
The girl leaned over and said:  
"Burr... gurr... King."



From [jokejive.com](http://jokejive.com)

### The Bush, by R.S. Thomas

I know that bush,  
Moses; there are many of them  
in Wales in the autumn, braziers  
where the imagination  
warms itself. I have put off  
pride and, knowing the ground  
holy, lingered to wonder  
how it is that I do not burn  
and yet am consumed.

And in this country  
of failure, the rain  
falling out of a black  
cloud in gold pieces  
there are none to gather,  
I have thought often  
of the fountain of my people  
that played beautifully here  
once in the sun's light  
like a tree undressing.

by R.S. Thomas (1913-2000)

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September.



Byddwch yn iach ac arhoswch yn ddiogel!