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## **Gelligaer Historical Society Newsletter**

**No 76 February 2026**

### **Welcome to your new-look newsletter!**

Hello all! My name is Ceri Creffield and I am the new editor of the GHS Newsletter. For those who do not know me, I am Bargoed born and bred and a former pupil of Bargod Grammar Technical School/Heolddu Comprehensive. I live now in Gilfach with my partner Leighton Smart, who manages the society's Facebook page.

I have been a member of this society for a number of years. Unlike many of you, I am not a trained historian - my degree at Oxford was in English Language and Literature - but I have always been deeply interested in history. I've always felt that there was a certain overlap between the disciplines, particularly in terms of social history.

After a long career in IT, I retired in October last year. Now at last I have more time for those things which really interest me! For instance, I run a small poetry group which meets once a month in Bargoed. I am also the secretary of the RS Thomas and ME Eldridge Society ([RS Thomas & ME Eldridge Society – RS Thomas & ME Eldridge Poetry & Arts Festival](#)).

I hope you enjoy the new format! If you have any feedback or if you have any contributions for the newsletter, you can reach me at [news.gelligaer@gmail.com](mailto:news.gelligaer@gmail.com).



## Recent Talks

Thank you to **David Mills** who stepped in at very short notice to give the Society's **September talk** -

### **“The Heir and The Spare to the Maesruddud Estate in 1793**

David's report of his talk reads:

The talk had the lengthy title of “The Heir and The Spare to the Maesruddud Estate in 1793 -who take us to Bedlinog and Undy, and their two sons who take us to Pontlottyn, Portugal and India”. The reason for mentioning the date 1793 was that the heir had literally, overnight, more than doubled the acreage of the Maesruddud estate.

The heir was William Williams (1746-1801) and the spare, Henry Williams (1752-1819).

On 7<sup>th</sup> December 1779 William married Alice Llewellyn of Garthgynydd farm (100 acres) which still exists near the village of Bedlinog. Alice had inherited the farm from her father together with Duffryn Rhymney farm, 213 acres, just south of present-day Pontlottyn and part of Tyr Pontlottyn farm. William and Alice lived at Garthgynydd until the death of his father in 1793, after which they moved with their son, Edmund, to live at Maesdruddud, near Blackwood. Just prior to his death in 1801 William wrote that both he and his wife were concerned that their son, Edmund, *would have but a slender means of support* should William die before his wife; this was because of the terms of their marriage settlement. They agreed that within twelve months of William's death, Edmund should have Maesruddud and Llwyn Arfon farms transferred into his name. William died in 1801. However, Edmund's parents need not have worried about his finances as he also married a lady who had inherited property in the Merthyr Tydfil/Dowlais area.

The spare, Henry Williams, attended Oxford University and went on to take Holy Orders, eventually becoming vicar of the parish of Undy, about half way between Caerleon and Chepstow. He married Martha Williams of Mathern. He continued as a vicar until his death in 1819. In his Will he bequeathed various items in his house to his house-keeper, including all *the bacon and cheeseto be found in his house*. His son, Sir Edmund Keynton Williams, was to get the residue of his estate and he appointed his nephew, Edmund Williams of Maesruddud, to be his executor. However, Edmund refused to act as executor *for fear of responsibility*.

Meanwhile Edmund, back at Maesruddud, had started to realise that the land he had inherited was valuable and in 1814 he granted a lease for a coal company to take the coal from beneath Maesruddud. At a date unknown he had also acquired the rest of the land belonging to Tyr Pontlottyn and, starting in 1827, he began granting leases of land for building purposes which was the beginning of the Maesruddud estate moving away from being a purely agricultural one. The houses and commercial premises at Pontlottyn, because they were all leasehold properties, continued to provide a steady and lucrative source of income for Edmund and his successors for decades. Edmund also acquired the farms of Carn Gethin and Glyngaer in the parish of Gelligaer; again they proved to be valuable acquisitions because of the coal mining industry. Edmund became a magistrate and deputy lieutenant of the county of Monmouthshire; when he died in 1850, he was wealthy land owner.

The spare's son, Edmund Keynton Williams, attended Oriel College, Oxford with the intention of entering the church. However, in 1799 he joined the army and became a well-known and gallant soldier. He took an active part in the peninsular war and was wounded on five occasions. In 1811 he married Caroline Hawker at the church of Charles the Martyr, Plymouth. Between 1820 to 1829 four of their daughters who died in infancy were buried at that church. He rose through the ranks and in 1816 was made a Knight Commander of the Bath. He was also made a Knight of the Tower and Sword by the Portuguese government in 1813. His infant son, Henriqe Hawker Gamage Williams who died in 1818, age five months, was buried at the church of Santa Anna, Tavira, Portugal.

He went on to serve in Madras and Bengal, India for several years. In 1841 he became a Major General and returned to Wales in 1848. However, on one of his voyages to India he blotted his copybook somewhat because the captain of the ship which carried both him and his men instituted court martial proceedings against him for *scandalous behaviour unbecoming of an officer and gentleman*. He was also charged with *witnessing and encouraged a scene of drunkenness by the officers under his command and he appeared on the poop deck in a discreditable state of intoxication*. He was found NOT GUILTY on all of the charges.

In 1849 Sir Edmund decided to remarry and bought a new house for himself and his bride to be. His tailor advised him that his wedding coat would not fit properly because of shrapnel still embedded in one of his wounds. Sir Edmund decided to have the shrapnel removed, but an infection set in and he died on the day set for his wedding. He is buried at Mathern church yard.

David Mills

The Society's **October talk** was given by **Stephen Brewer, secretary of Merthyr and District History Society**.

Steve gave a very comprehensive description of a tornado of October 1913, concentrating on how it wrought havoc on its path northward through the Taff Valley between Pontypridd and

Edwardsville, also extending eastwards into Trelewis and Bedlinog. He suggested that this event is not very well known because it was overshadowed by the major tragedy of the Senghenydd Colliery disaster, two weeks previously.

First reports of the storm were recorded at 4 p.m. at Exeter, and Steve described how it crossed the Bristol Channel between Watchet (near Minehead) and Aberthaw, before increasing in intensity to the east of Llantrisant. It then veered into the Taff Valley where it joined a secondary storm which had developed near Treforest. With the aid of maps and diagrams, he explained the meteorological conditions which had led to this storm now becoming a level 6, with winds of up to 160 mph. The storm, Steve said, continued up the Taff Valley before again changing direction, blowing over Cefn Merthyr to Bedlinog, gradually losing force and continuing eastward and northward, finally blowing itself out over Shropshire and Cheshire where very little damage was reported.

Steve continued his talk by showing photographs which illustrated the severe damage in the local towns and villages – mainly Glyn Taff and Pontypridd, Cilfynydd, Abercynon, Edwardsville and the northern part of Bedlinog.

While emphasising the deaths, the damage and the danger of the event, Stephen Brewer still managed to give his presentation with his usual mix of gravity and, often self-deprecating, humour.

Stephen Brewer has also published an article on this subject, **The Taff Valley Tornado 1913, in *Merthyr Historian*, vol. 25 (2013).**

Judith Jones



**November's** talk was given by **Lyn Pask**, who has spoken to Gelligaer Historical Society on a number of occasions previously, this time covering **Landslides in the Rhymney Valley**.

Lyn illustrated and explained all aspects of his talk with diagrams and pictures, and where appropriate, extracts from OS maps.

He began by saying that a belt of landslides crosses the north-eastern part of the South Wales coalfield area and proceeded to explain the several possible causes of these. He discussed post-glaciation effects (up to 10-12,000 years ago), when the steep valley sides of the glaciated valleys were left unstable after the retreat of the glaciers, and also spoke of other factors such as the different types of strata, where softer, weaker layers, under the harder Pennant Sandstone are more prone to erosion and thus subsequent landslides.

Lyn Pask then mentioned the activities of man, particularly, after 19th century industrialisation. Some landslides can be attributed directly to coal-mining on seams up to a fault plane, and coal or spoil tip slips are another cause. For example, he described the tragedy at Aberfan; the great loss of life, despite existing concerns about the instability of the tip above the village which had originally been established over springs on the mountain. This disaster led to the NCB guidance for spoil tips.

Using his engineering and geology background, Lyn Pask then concentrated on one aspect that he maintained was of major importance. From the 1850s, coal was extracted from the Middle coal seams which outcrop on the valley sides and which were found between two permeable layers of rock. Removal of the coal allowed water to fill the space and openings enlarged in pervious strata forming conditions for landslips. Since 1886 in particular, mining and a narrow band of quicksand which stretches across the valley from Fochriw to Llanhilleth has been said to be important.

Lyn continued by describing the topography of the Rhymney valley south of Pontlottyn and the Sirhowy valley together with the sites of some of the earlier pits, particularly Powell Dyffryn's Tredegar Colliery and the Bedwellty Pits.

This led on to fascinating and very detailed descriptions of the effect of landslips on buildings, houses, transport links, pits, landscape – and village people! The biggest landslide, Lyn said, lies east of the Rhymney river, to the north of New Tredegar, affecting Abertysswg, but similar features are also found at Troedrhifwuch where the adjacent landslip on Cefn Brithdir has been a problem since the 19<sup>th</sup> century – and continues to the present day. Lyn Pask's final example was at Troedrhwygwair, a village of 96 houses in the Sirhowy Valley where a 1973 geological survey of the mountainside above the village reported that at least £400,000 would be needed to make the area safe. However, it was decided that all houses were eventually to be demolished, although very few were still occupied, and the remaining ones became subject to a CPO.

Lyn Pask's talk gave rise to much discussion and many questions, including some from inhabitants of Tirphil and New Tredegar who are still suffering from the results of these landslides.

Judith Jones



**December's** talk was given by **Stephen Jones** on **BRUNEL IN SOUTH WALES PART 2**

An interesting, informative talk showing how the Brunel family was involved with South Wales throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Isambard Kingdom Brunel followed his father into engineering and continued his links with Wales. He was the chief engineer in the construction of the Great Western Railway and worked on other South Wales railways. Developed ports at Penarth, Neyland and Milford Haven- which was later used as a key port for his ship the SS Great Eastern, his third and largest ship; the other two being the SS Great Britain and the SS Great Western. Another link with Wales was the Brown Lennox Company at Pontypridd, Brunel used their chains for his last, and biggest ship, the SS Great Eastern. He designed a number of timber viaducts around the South Wales coast. The Chepstow Railway Bridge and the Loughor viaduct in Swansea were his South Wales bridges but he also built The Clifton Suspension Bridge and The Royal Albert Bridge.

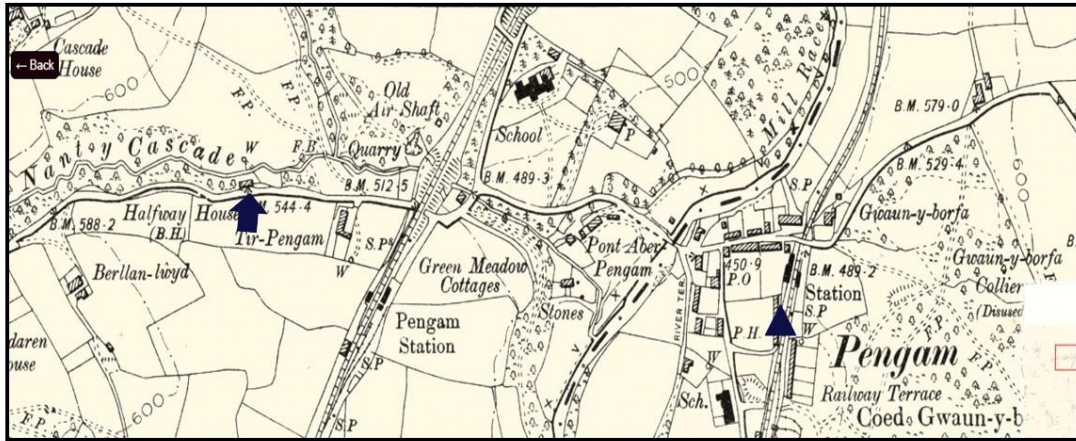
His son, Henry Marc Brunel, continued the family history in engineering and again was involved with South Wales, developing the use of hydraulics at dock yards and introducing them at Barry Docks. Tower Bridge was another instance of his work with hydraulics.

Mr Jones made mention of quotes concerning engineering one of which was 'The engineer had not merely to consider the present but also the future' and this is certainly true when we look at the achievements of the Brunel family.

An evening appreciated by all present as questions and remarks from members showed.

Ann Pinch

## Features



Extract from a map of 1901 showing the locations of the Halfway House and the Smith's Arms. The Halfway is marked with the dark blue arrow and The Smith's (P.H.) is near the dark blue triangle shape on the right-hand side of the map.

## THE SMITH'S ARMS PENGAM -The Rees Family

### PREFACE

Over the past two years or so the Society has received information from Elaine Buckley, who lives in Australia, about the research she was carrying out in respect of her families, namely the Rees family who kept the Smith's Arms at Pengam and the Walters family who owned a shop and other property in the Gilfach area. Elaine has now finalized her work and sent the Society very detailed documents, which not only cover the family trees, but also provide some very interesting "stories". It is intended these edited extracts from her extensive research will be published in the Society's newsletters.

## THE FIRST STORY

Naomi Walters was born 13th December 1855 at Cwm yr Alt, Gelligaer. She was the daughter of Lewis Walters and Rachel Walters (nee Rees). In the **1861 census** she was with her parents and siblings at the **Halfway House**, Gelligaer. Her father Lewis Walters was described as a coal miner and publican. In the **1871 census** she was still with her parents at the Halfway House aged 15 and described as an assistant housekeeper. This is not however the large Halfway hotel that once stood near the railway station at Pengam until demolished several years ago. The Halfway House pub in question was situated on the right-hand side of the road as you travel from Pengam railway station to Penpedairheol.

Naomi Walters (19) married William Rees (26) on **25th May 1874** at the Parish Church in Bedwelty. Witnesses were Henry Morgan and Mary Lewis. William's signature was a mark 'X'. William's father Evan Rees was deceased. Naomi's father Lewis Walters was present. Samuel John was the vicar.

In the **1891 census** William and Naomi were at the Smith Arms Inn, Pengam with their children, Rachel (Apprentice Dressmaker), Margaret, William Lewis, Samuel John, Taliesin, Thomas. Also at the premises are David Jones - Pontypridd - Underman in the colliery and his wife Ann Jones. According to the Publican Licences for Bedwellty Civil Parish the inn was owned by a Mr D Jones of Fleur de Lys. The inn was sold between 1895-1896, possibly to William and Naomi Rees. However, all was not well at the Smith Arms. The *South Wales Daily News*, dated the 16th May 1899 carried the headlines: -

*A PENGAM SENSATION- EXTRAORDINARY CASE, ALLEGED FORCIBLE CONFINEMENT FOR 8 YEARS. STORY OF A DEED OF ASSIGNMENT FORTHCOMING APPLICATION IN CHANCERY*

"The quiet little village of Pengam is just now in possession of a sensation, the rights and wrongs of which are to be fought out in the Chancery Division before Mr Justice Kekewich on Friday next. Not only in Pengam, but in all the neighbouring villages; the extraordinary story told by **Mrs Nancy Jones** is the one theme of conversation. Pengam itself appears divided into two camps, the one portion declaring its belief in **Mrs Jones's** story, and the other not giving much credence to it". At this stage it is worth noting that at the time there were two settlements known as Pengam; one was in the old county of Glamorganshire and the other in the old county of Monmouthshire. The settlements were divided by the Rhymney River and to distinguish between them they were commonly known as Pengam (Mon) and Pengam (Glam), the latter is now known as Glanynant, although the railway station has retained the name of Pengam.

The plaintiff in the case was **Mrs Nancy Jones**, whose husband died some eight years previously. She inherited from her father considerable property, including the Smiths Arms and two adjacent houses. The Smiths Arms is kept by William and Naomi Rees, relatives of Mrs Jones, the plaintiff, who had been living with them for eight years past. Mr and Mrs Rees were the defendants in the impending action, which was an application to set aside a deed of assignment

alleged to have been made by Mrs Jones transferring her property to the defendants, Mrs Jones alleged that when she signed the deed of assignment, she did not know what the nature of the document was. Mr James Morgan, of Cardiff, was the solicitor for the plaintiff, while Mr G M G Glazier, of Blackwood and Newport, acted for the defendants.

On Monday afternoon a representative of the newspaper visited Pengam for the purpose of investigating this remarkable story. He first called upon Mrs Nancy Jones, who was staying with friends at 4 and 5 High Street, Pengam. He described her as a woman between 50 and 60 years of age, got the impression that she has recently recovered from a severe illness. She readily consented to tell the reporter her story which is reproduced as follows:-

"I lived with the **Rees** family for about eight years, she said, and during that time I was kept by them practically in confinement. I was not allowed out, and was kept upstairs, my bedroom door being fastened with string tied to a staple on the outside. My meals were brought to me, and if I did not touch them they were left there"

Were you never allowed to go out?

"Two or three times I was - to funerals - but one of the **Rees** family always kept close to me, and would not let me talk to other people"

Were you badly treated?

"I was pulled round the room by the hair of my head"

Could you escape?

"I could not. I used to look out of my bedroom window to try and jump, but it was too high"

Did not friends ever call to see you?

"Yes, sometimes; and then the **Rees's** used to ask me if I was well treated, and I had to say that I was, because I was afraid they would ill-treat me afterwards if I did not"

Had you plenty of clothes?

"No, very few, and they were dirty"

Do you claim that the property is yours?

"Yes, I do" replied **Mrs Jones**. "I signed my name to a document while there - not knowing what it was - and I am now told that it was a deed of assignment handing over all my property to the **Rees's**, who of course are my relatives"

At this point a friend of Mrs Jones's, who was present, volunteered the statement that Mrs Jones's memory had got very bad while she was kept at the Smiths Arms, but that within the past three months, since she had come among friends, it had steadily improved with returning health. Mrs Jones's friend went on to say that at first she (Mrs Jones) had failed to remember anything about the deed being signed, but now she was able to remember being asked to sign something, though what it was she did not know at the time.

The reporter asked Mrs Jones- how did she subsequently escape. Her reply was:-

"Well, the new Fire Brigade came round to practice, and some of the **Rees** family were away, and some had gone out to see the brigade, so I saw an opportunity and succeeded in getting away and running to some cottages near and there I found friends". Mrs Jones's friend explained that she had now not a penny, even the dress that she wore having been given to her. She was in a terrible state when she escaped, and had witnesses to prove it.

The reporter then made for the Smiths Arms and saw **Mr Rees** in the passage who led him into a private room and said, "Ah, my solicitor, Mr Glasier, is here; you had, I think, better see him"

A moment later, the reporter said he was ushered into the presence of Mr Glasier.

"It's a difficult matter to say much about" said Mr Glazier "It is a question of fact that the court will have to settle. Needless to say my client indignantly repudiates the allegations made against him. They have treated Mrs Jones well, and are quite at a loss to know why she has turned against them as she has done. She was not confined here, and as a matter of fact her bedroom window is only a few feet from the ground, so that had she desired to jump out of it she could do so. As to the deed of assignment that was duly made, for I was present two years since when it was signed. I acted as a go-between, and it was on my suggestion that a covenant was inserted in that deed to the effect and Mr and Mrs Rees should provide a home for Mrs Jones during the remainder of her life".

Subsequently, Mrs Rees herself came in and escorted the reporter to the supposed "prison" who noted there was no lock on the door of the room which had been used by Mrs Jones, neither was there any sign on the doorpost of any staple ever having been driven in by which to make fast a rope on the outside. Mrs Rees told the reporter that while with them **Mrs Jones** was always most kindly treated, and that they spent a small fortune driving her about. They had plenty of witnesses who could swear to seeing her about in the house. As for the allegations of uncleanness the sanitary officials and the doctors had visited the place and had found that everything was clean and right.

*The South Wales Daily News* on the **20th May 1889** carried an account of the action heard in the Chancery Division of the High Court. which was deal with by Mr Justice Cozens-Hardy. Mr Warrington Q.C., said he had a motion for an injunction to restrain the defendant **Rees** from dealing with certain licensed premises at Pengam, near Cardiff. The Judge said he could not hear the motion because the evidence was very contradictory, and therefore it was quite plain, even if the matter were ripe, it could not be thrashed out on motion, and they would have to arrange for a speedy trial of that action.

However, Mr Warrington Q.C. addressed the Judge and submitted that there was evidence that the value of the public house of late had been depreciated owing to the existing state of things. What they wished was for the present to do something that would prevent any danger of the

licence being forfeited, and it was therefore proposed to appoint a receiver and manager for a fortnight with any direction to him that might be arranged or convenient, which would avoid turning out the defendant. Mr Renshaw, Q.C., said there was no evidence of any misconduct on the part of the defendant or any danger of the licence being lost. The Judge said the appointment of a receiver would involve the running out of the defendant. Mr Renshaw said that if his learned friend had read the defendant's evidence, he would not think the plaintiff had evidence on his side. Mr Warrington asked if the defendant would undertake not to do anything to endanger the licence in the meantime. Mr Renshaw was prepared to give that undertaking, as it would be against his own interest to do anything to endanger the licence. He went on to say the defendant had sold the house for what he considered to be a good price, but his learned friend thought it an insufficient price, and was hampering the sale. The Judge then directed the motion to stand over until the first motion day in next sittings, on the undertaking that defendant should not do anything to endanger the licence.

A further newspaper article in the *Evening Express* dated **28th June 1889** carried an account -

*Pengam Property Dispute*. Mr Justice Kekewich dealt with the case the case of **Jones v Rees**, The Plaintiff, Jones, sought to have the deed of assignment to the defendant, Rees, of the Smith's Arms, Pengam, Mon., and two cottages set aside. It was stated by counsel, who opened the case that the plaintiff was, that prior to the execution of the deed, the owner of the Smith's Arms, was briefly, that she was not a free agent at the time when it was executed. She had become entitled to the property on the death of her father in **1873**, and she and her husband prior to the latter's death raised certain sums on mortgages on the property. In **December 1878** a deed was executed by which the mortgages were consolidated and assigned to certain brewers, the amount being then upwards £335. In **January 1891** further sums amounting to £455 were raised on the property. It was stated that the Plaintiff, on the death of her husband, was persuaded by the defendant to go with him. She alleged that from that moment, she was excluded from her relatives and friends and was confined to her room, and when she went out, she was under this supervision. Whilst under this supervision she executed a Will in favour of the defendant. The deed in question was executed on the **12th August 1895**.

On the **22nd April 1899**, the plaintiff, taking advantage of some local excitement which had induced everybody to go out of doors, made her escape, and found refuge in the house of Mr and Mrs Waller, where she had been with ever since, though the defendant and his wife and daughter had attempted to get her back. The knowledge of the deed was kept concealed, but it came to the notice of the plaintiff's solicitor and the present action was commenced.

Mrs Jones was called in support of her case, and was subjected to lengthy cross examination for the purpose of showing that she was in no sense a prisoner while residing with the defendant. In the course of it Mrs Jones said she intended the defendant to have her property, all she wanted was a comfortable home. She would not go back to **Rees**, but she was quite willing that the defendant should have the public house if she could have the two cottages.

At the conclusion of her evidence, the barristers for the parties discussed certain matters which resulted in a settlement. It was agreed that all charges should be withdrawn and the sale which would be affected should be carried out of £50 a year chargeable upon the premises. The **1901 census** shows Mrs Jones and the Rees family still at the Smith Arms.



The Smith's Arms today

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