



## Cwmgwrach Minorettes Jazz Band

by Roy Bowen | Associations, Marching Bands



One of the most successful groups in the village in the last 50 years are the Cwmgwrach Minorettes Jazz Band. In the 70's and 80's there were many Jazz Bands formed in the mining communities of the UK, probably caused by the lack of things to do in these areas, and in particular for the youngsters?

These Marching Bands were originally formed in the Welsh mining towns during the depression of the 1930s as a form of affordable family

entertainment during the economic downturn, the inspiration for the Bands being the colliery brass bands. They reappeared and reached their peak of popularity in the 60's and 70's.

Below are the memories compiled by Diane Aveyard-Davies of that time, based on her own memories and by asking the Band committee and Band members for their memories as well. If we have missed anything or missed anyone out, let us know so we can include you.

## The Story Begins:

The Cwmgwrach Minorettes were formed in 1971 after a discussion between friends Margaret James and Christine Thomas. The quote below by Margaret explains what inspired them to start a Jazz Band.

*"It was after seeing Jazz bands in the Carnivals we went to. We were in awe of them, and thought it would be fun if we could start our own. We got a load of girls interested and arranged to meet at the school field".*

These girls then approached their parents to see if they would form a committee which a number of them parents agreed to do. They also approached Alan and Liz Hill along with Susan Slocombe and from these early beginnings the band was formed. Mr. Jack Price who had previously trained the Cwmgwrach Cadets for the past 30 years was brought in to train the girls. The committee were known to the band by the use of Aunty and Uncle (a sign of respect to your elders) as is the way in the village, for example Aunty Myrna, Aunty Glenda, Uncle Alan etc. except for Mr. Price the trainer, who out of respect, was always known as Mr. Price.

The name "Cwmgwrach Minorettes" was suggested by Christine's father Gomer Thomas, the name being based on the strong links to the mining industry in the village.

## The Jazz Band Committee:

The committee was an integral part of the Bands success, and parents and committee members invested their own money to initially get it up and running. Going forward the committee worked tirelessly to raise funds initially for instruments such as drums and kazoos, along with the bands first uniforms. The first uniform of purple skirts / trousers and white blouses / shirts were hand made and all the committee pitched in to make them.

Diane Aveyard-Davies remembers her mum Marion Aveyard, despite working full time:

*“sitting up till the early hours of the morning sewing, and no doubt so did many other committee members. A special mention must go to Mrs. Annie Godsall and Mrs. Jean Shaw who helped with this huge task despite not having any children in the Band themselves, another helper was Mrs. Morgan (top of Dunraven Street) who some of the band members remembered going to for a fitting”.*

The committee met on a Monday night in the lounge of the Dunraven Arms. To help raise money they organised a weekly Tote, Raffles, along with a kids Disco on a Friday night in the Welfare Hall. The disco was organised by the Band and supported by local boy's Kelvin Thomas, Peter Rees and Malcolm Brake, not forgetting Marion Aveyard in the Tuck Shop, and Alan Aveyard on the door. As well as all that fundraising the Band members contributed a weekly subscription of 20p. The committee also organised sponsored walks and an annual carnival which the whole village would look forward to and

participate in by putting up banners and flags, dressing up, and a good time was had by all.

As well as all the above activities, the committee would also support local charities, they made a monthly donation to the OAP association in the village and also gave generously to the Miners strike fund. Food parcels were also provided for the striking miners and their families from donations collected door to door by jazz band members of all ages. These donations would then be distributed from the welfare hall on a weekly basis. *Editors note: I think we can all agree a fantastic effort and exceptional village community spirit shown by these youngsters.*

The committee members would also support the band by organising their trips away, and in their very smart Black Blazers with Team badge (see photo of the team badge below) and black Trousers would walk alongside the Band encouraging and praising them during their marches. A photo of the badge has been put up on the Bands face book page by one of the Band members, Shirley Watkins son Colin Watkins.



Badge designed by Nick Thomas

## Photograph of the Jazz Band Committee: (with names)



*And the people that made it possible for us all to make the great memories we did.*

*Our great committee*

*Back row Mr Jackie Price trainer, Mansel James,*

*Dai Rex, Jean Price, Glenda Edwards, Olive Morgan, Marion Aveyard, Myrna Evans, Shirley Watkins, Anthea Thomas, Enid James,*

*Diane Aveyard & Darren Morgan*

*Not sure where my dad Alan Aveyard is but he devoted a lot of his time to the jazz band too*

Training of the band would take place twice per week either in the Welfare Park, the School Field or the School playground. The success of the band can be directly attributed to the trainer Mr. Jack Price, who's experience of training the village Cadets for over 30 years stood him in good stead, and it was under his leadership and attention to detail and precision that the band flourished, but also not forgetting the dedication and perseverance of the band members as well.

So the band has been trained, the Instruments procured and learned, the Uniforms had been lovingly made, Tunes have been learned, it's showtime. The first competition was a local competition, the Band met in Liz and Alan garden before travelling to Rhigos, I guess the nerves must have been high, but the result was fantastic, after all this time and effort the Band achieved First Place.

**Photos taken in Liz and Alan Hills garden, showing the early Band members in their first uniform:**



Left – Right:  
Alison Jenkins, Susan Slocombe,  
Iris Phipps, Diane Aveyard.



Left – Right:  
Margaret James, Christine Thomas,  
Dai Rex.



Left – Right  
Alison Evans, Sian Breslin,  
Tracey Price, Karen Edwards.



Left – Right:  
Louvaine James, Beverly Prosser, Helen  
Yanton,  
Carol Jones, Christine Kelly,  
Karen Edwards.



Left – Right:  
Dawn Hopkins, Karen Watkins, Mandy  
Davies,  
Liane Voice, Allison Jenkins, Diane  
Everard.



Left – Right:  
Janice James, Michelle Rae, Annette  
Thomas,  
Hilary Lewis, Karen Edwards, Tina  
Roberts.

On returning home the Band commenced a victory lap around the village. In all the excitement of the win the top of the Drum Major's, Karen Edwards,

Mace came off and flew through the air hitting we think Alison Evans who was in the front rank, then becoming lost in someones garden. It was never found, and it may have been Aunty Myrna, as she was know to everyone, who said, *"Oh bugger it, we will buy a new one"* or something similar.

*Editors note: I remember the top of the Mace being made in the Cam Gears toolroom when I was an apprentice there.*

## The Development of the Band over the Years:

As time went on more and more people joined the Band with the membership growing to over 60 members with ages ranging from 5 to 16 years of age, as Diane remembers herself joining at 5 years of age. There were competitions most weekends during the summer months with the Band boarding the Ken Hopkins bus outside Aunty Myrna's house in Heol Nedd with their packed lunch and pocket money. Such was the friendly nature of the Band that the bus driver George asked if he could drive the bus every weekend and he would bring his son Philip, and daughters Debbie and Susan along with him.

Eventually the Band bought their own bus with Alan Aveyard and Gwyn Richards sharing the driving, but despite this George and his family would still come and support the Band week in week out. A number of the parents would not miss a competition either, and if there was no room on the bus they would follow in their cars. Diane especially remembers Gwyn and Thelma Richards coming along in their camper van most weekends.

I think everyone can remember these bus journeys and the comradeship and singing that took place on the journey back home after a long day competing. One of the most popular songs was **"Bless Them All"**, with the words changed by Mr. Price to suit the Band, another was **"Myrna, Myrna show us you legs"**.

Some of the songs played by the Band during competitions, were, **"Over There"**, **"Brazil"**, **"My Granfather's Clock"** and **"Sloop John B"**.

The Band competed at local events up and down the South Wales valley's during the summer months, and on a number of occasions competed across the border in English competitions as well. Being from Wales the Band made many friends amongst the English Bands, in particular **"The Trinity Georgians"** from Telford, who enjoyed coming to Wales to compete in the Cwmgwrrach carnival several times. There were other trips away to places like Stourport on Severn, Newcastle and even a few weekends in Blackpool. This was all made possible by the fundraising activities of the committee and Band members which meant that the parents of the

children did not have to pay a single penny for these trips. ***Ed. What and achievement.***

From these early beginning's there followed many years of success, with the band winning countless competitions and becoming one of the outstanding bands in South Wales. It is said you often heard other Bands saying "Oh no, the Minorettes are here".

As well as competing during the summer months as a whole band, there were also competitions during the Winter months as well. . These were know as " drummers & leaders" competitions and usually took place indoors on a stage or in a hall. So the summer months were for the whole band and usually outdoors, and these Drummers, Leaders and Mascot competitions would happen during the winter months . Again the Band proved to be very successful in these winter competitions and would normally come away with many 1st places and Individual Cups and Trophies.

The Band won the Welsh Championship on a number of occasions, where the scores from the individual wins were added together to come up with an overall winner. There were many individual trophies won as well, such as Welsh champion Drum Major (Karen Edwards) Mascot's (Diane Aveyard, Darren Morgan, and Deborah Price) Lead Drummer (Gareth Davies) Base Drummer (Colin Watkins) and Drum Section (Dawn Hopkins, Alison Evans, Louvaine James, Karen Watkins, David Davies and David Williams). These are just a few Band members mentioned, as well as the main body of the Band, in the ranks as they were known. They all did a great job, working as one big team and what a good job they did too. They also made it through to four or more World Championships.

All of the above outstanding achievements were made possible under the guidance of Mr Jack Price, the Bands trainer. His attention to detail and precision were the foundation of the Bands success over the years.

Diane say's, *"Being in the Band, we were like one big family, we had such special times and made lifelong friends along the way"*. You can certainly get that feeling from reading some of the other comments on the Bands face book page.

## Competitions won over the years:

**More to follow , once we have the information.**

West Glamorgan Champions 1975

Welsh Open Champions 1978

World Championship 7th out of 35 Bands



## End of an era:

Like all good things, they eventually come to an end. The Band had been going from 1971 to 1984/5'ish and had probably naturally come to the end of it's life. As the Band members grew older different hobbies and interests open up for them, for some of the boy's in the band sport became more of a pull on their time, with a few of them joining the Cwmgwrach Youth Rugby team, and other's playing football.

No one can quite put their finger of why it finished, especially after all this time, and there are probably many reasons for the Band finishing, like GCSE's, other Sports, but it probably can all be put down to them reaching a different stage in their lives, as they say, all things move on.

As the committee came to realise that the Band was in danger of finishing, they decided to call a meeting to encourage other people to replace them as committee members, but with no luck, so unfortunately after over a decade of playing together the Band finally finished.

## The Legacy of the Band:

If you look to the Bands face book page you will see a number of the Band members commenting that it was the **"Best time of their lives"** and what greater tribute could there be than that. They had become one of the leading Jazz Bands in South Wales, they had made new friends that continue to this day, they had learned to work together as a team, and they made memories that would last them a life time.

All this was done under the guidance of the fantastic Committee that was formed in the first year, that guided and supported them for the lifetime of the Band. They raised funds for Instruments, Uniforms, trips and supported local charities as well as the Miners Strike fund. Also they couldn't have achieved the success that they did if it wasn't for the experience, and I guess patience, of their trainer Mr. Price.

## 50th Anniversary of the band 2021:

**Looking forward, 2021 will be the 50th Anniversary of the formation of the band, Diane and Darren Morgan have discussed a possible reunion celebration of Band members, once the Covid restrictions are lifted. We will have to wait and see what can be arranged.**

## List of Band members over the years:

**Drum Major** ~ Karen Edwards. **Mascot** ~ Darren Morgan, Deborah Price, Diane Aveyard.

**Bass Drum** ~ Colin Watkins.

**Lead / Tipper Drummer** ~ Gareth Davies. **Drum Corps** ~ Louvaine James,

Dawn Hopkins, Alison Evans, Karen Watkins, David Davies, David Williams.  
**Ranks** ~ Olive Morgan, Julie Morgan, Gaynor Evans, Dawn Williams, Julie Watkins, Karen Watkins, Mandy Davies, Kay Stanley, Sharon Owen, Yvonne Addey, Marion Hughes, Margaret James, Tina Roberts, Christine Thomas, Susan Watts, Beverly Prosser, Annette Thomas, Sian Breslyn, Helen Yanton, Lisa Jones, Nicky Richards, Suzanne Jenkins, Alison Jenkins, Tina Watkins, Andrea Gillard, Ceri Jenkins, Gail Jenkins, Val Cole, Angela Scott, Vicky Evans, Joanne Houston, Angela Kelly, Julie Roberts, Ann Jones, Janice James, Carol Jones, Deborah Simons, Michelle Rae, Pauline Thomas, Dawn Crick, Tracey Price, Julie Yates, Pauline Hughes, Barbara Reese, Lianne Voice, Lauren Voice, Janine Voice, Maureen Curry, Julie Roberts (Ave) Eileen Morgan, Debbie Waters, Linda Hobbs, Hillary Lewis, Patricia Davies, Rhiannon Price, Debbie Phillips, Judith Thomas, Angela Stanley, Kim Tregonning, Helen Bannister, Sharon Bannister, Donna Martin, Pamela Martin & Anthony Joseph.


## Slideshow:

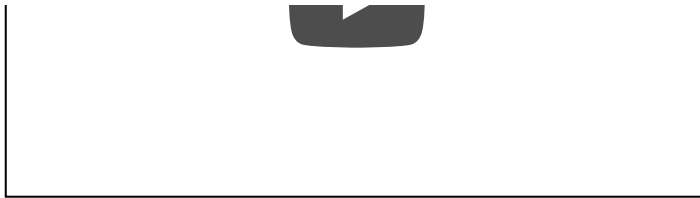


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## Short video from the Cwmgwrach 13th Neath Scout Carnival:

Cwmgwrach Minorettes Jazz Ba...





Click here to see some Newspaper Clippings of the Band:

## Resources and References:

Thank you to Mal Brake and the Team for the making the video of the 1977 Scout carnival.

Thank you to Enid James for lending us the DVD of the 1977 Scout Carnival.

Thank you to Diane Aveyard-Davies for collating all the memories and names of the Band, and the Band members for providing the information.

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