

SAMPLE

BLAENAU GWENT HERITAGE

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EDITORIAL

It is a truism that the greater part of the local histories of Blaenau Gwent communities over the centuries (or anywhere else for that matter) is not recorded to anywhere near the extent that it should be or sometimes even at all. This is because the source material – the documentary evidence of diaries, notebooks, photographs, old bibles, minutes of societies etc., etc., have all gone to the “ashman”¹, or into the skip when a house is cleared following the death of its elderly resident. Two examples of how interesting surviving documents as a record of a particular time in local history can be, are to be found in this Journal in the accounts of: “Tredegar’s smallest house” and the “Cleaning of the chapel”.

Who knows how many other relevant resources for Blaenau history are still in existence - lying in drawers, old tin trunks, attics etc. etc. It is certain in the editor’s opinion that there are plenty but how can they be got hold of before they are thrown away?

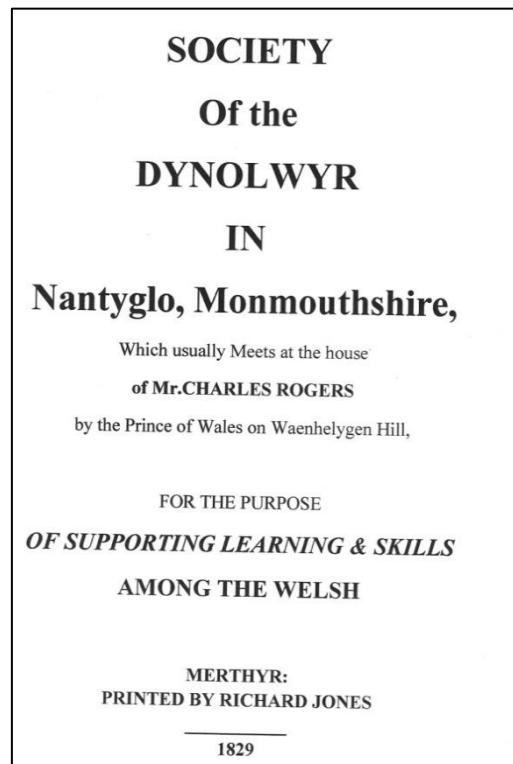
More.....

¹ When the editor was growing-up the council’s refuse collection was always referred to in Rhymney as the ‘Ashman’ calling.

THE BLAENAU GWENT SOCIETY OF “DYNOLWYR” THEIR AIMS OR MANIFESTO

Colin Morgan

In the previous Blaenau Gwent Heritage Forum Journal No. 23, I described the membership rules of this extraordinary Welsh language only society *Cymdeithas y Dynolwyr* which emerged in the Nantyglo and Brynmawr area in the early nineteenth century. The rules of the society (discussed in the last Journal) and its *manifesto* were printed and published in 1829 by the Merthyr Tydfil printers: Richard Jones.² The following is the translated front page of the published document:



The front page of the document gives the house location of where the Society met, and name of whose house it was - a Mr. Charles Rogers, on the last page of the document the name of the contact person - a John Price who states that he is a Shoemaker at Nant y Glo.

The Society's meeting place in 1829 - Charles Roger's house, is described as "by the Prince of Wales (clearly a Public House or Inn) on Waenhelygen Hill". In

² Richard Jones: an account of Richard Jones as a printer in Merthyr and elsewhere can be found at: <https://stumblingintheshadowsofgiants.wordpress.com/2013/12/07/a-history-of-printing-and-printers-in-wales-transcribed/>

the early 1800s this area of *Waun-y-Helygen* was one of small farm dwellings which would soon become a town of significant size to be named Brynmawr.³ Hence what had in the eighteenth century been the small community of *Waun- y- Helegyn* exploded in the nineteenth into the thriving industrial town of Brynmawr due to the development nearby of ironworks at Nantyglo, Clydach and Beaufort. The Prince of Wales Inn was still going strong in 1859 and recorded as being in King Street, Brynmawr.⁴ King Street survives to this day as does the building formally the Prince of Wales Public House and some of its outbuildings currently known as 37 and 38 King Street.



Contemporary picture showing King Street & its street name plate, above is a name plate that says: “Prince’s Place”

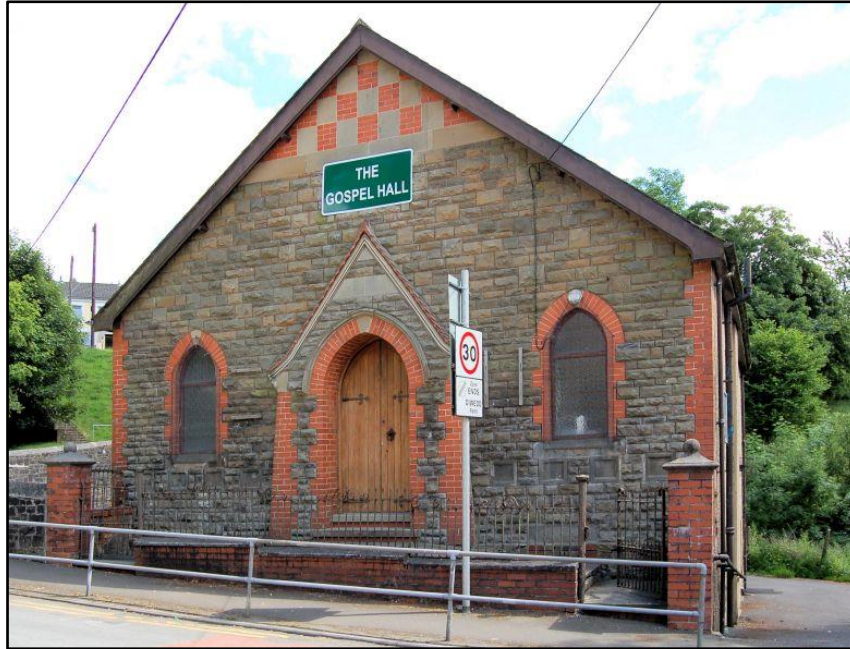
A search for Charles Rogers in the 1841 Census of Brynmawr found him described as a *Currier*, and he is also described as such in Pigot’s Directory later that decade. A *currier* was someone who ‘cured’ leather for a wide variety of trades such as saddle and shoemakers etc. and who applied techniques of dressing, finishing and colouring to a tanned hide to make it strong, flexible and waterproof. This is interesting given that John Price the contact for the Dynolwyr society was a shoemaker, so maybe they had a commercial relationship as well as their membership of the Dynolwyr Society. *More*

³ For a short account of the history, see: Brynmawr: A Study of a Distressed Area, Allenson & Co., London, 1934, Hilda Jennings

⁴ See: The Public Houses and Inns of Brynmawr in 1859. Eifion Lloyd Davies 2017.

CLEANING THE CHAPEL – POPLAR ROAD CONGREGATIONAL CHAPEL TREDEGAR

Kenneth Davies



Poplar Road Congregational Chapel Tredegar later the Gospel Hall

*Poplar Road Church.
Cleaner's agreement*

I, Mr^s Davis agree to accept the position of cleaner, on the conditions stated below.

- 1) To be responsible for the opening and closing of the building of the building after each service during week nights*
- 2) To attend to the gas and fire when necessary.*
- 3) The building to be opened 15 minutes before each service.*
- 4) The building to be scrubbed once each month, the aisle, vestibule, and steps each week. Windows when necessary.*
- 5) To keep the building clean to the satisfaction of the officers of the Church.*
- 6) To provide all necessary utensils and material for cleaning purposes at my own expense.*
- 7) The salary for same to be 15/6 per lunar month, equal to £10.1.6 per annum.*
- 8) Five shillings to be paid for extra cleaning and boiling water for all public teas.*

Signed A. Davis
On behalf of the Church Thomas Jenkins (Secy)
This fourteenth day of September 1938

NB: This 'Cleaners Agreement' is much larger in the Journal

Poplar Road Congregational chapel, which became the Gospel Hall in the early 1970s, was one of the scores of chapels built during the industrial development of Blaenau Gwent. Their congregations often began meeting in private houses before they achieved enough money to build a chapel. Having built the chapel, the congregation and its officers subsequently arranged for its upkeep, opening times, and regular cleaning etc. What follows is the agreement regarding the opening, closing, cleaning, and general upkeep of the chapel which was signed by the author's grandmother in 1938: *More.....*

GALLIPOLI – A BLAENAU BOY’S WW1

Richard Evans of Rhymney

Kenneth Price



Photo of Richard Evans in later life, believed to have been taken in the Miners' Convalescent Home at Talygarn.

I was first introduced to my great-uncle Richard in February 2016, when my cousin, an equally enthusiastic family historian, handed me a medal and asked what I could find out about it. When I say introduced perhaps, I should elaborate. Richard died in 1938, fifteen years before I was born, so I didn't meet him but what traces he left still speak to me across the years. The medal I recognised as the British War medal from the 1914-18 War, although I was surprised to see it on its own, however I knew it would have the soldier's name and service number inscribed around the edge and sure enough, there it was, "13084 Pte R Evans S. Wales Bord." I was hooked, I had to find out more. What I found revealed not only Richard's biography as a coalminer and soldier but also a much fuller picture of World War 1. His World War 1 experience was not the much-recorded Western front and trench warfare; but about action in a different but important theatre of war; Gallipoli and the Middle East.

Richard stems from my maternal family. I'd been researching my maternal grandparents' families but there was nothing to really get my teeth into on my grandmother's side. She had died before I was born, after years of illness which I came to view with far more sympathy when I found she'd given birth to thirteen children, losing five of them in infancy and early childhood. Richard was her younger brother and, according to a family story - in hushed tones - "wasn't welcome in the house you know, he was a bit of a drinker".

Census records show Richard's family living at Forge Street, in the shadow of the Rhymney Iron Works, since about 1881.⁵ His grandfather, an iron puddler, came from Carmarthen before 1841 and had lived at nearby Quarry Row from around 1861⁶ where his son John - Richard's father - was born. Their background was in iron as cinder fillers and puddlers, no doubt moving from Carmarthen to Rhymney when the Rhymney Iron Company expanded their business in the late 1830s - the Evans family first appeared in the 1841 census at nearby Plantation Field⁷ and lived, appropriately enough, in Puddlers Arms Row in 1851.⁸ Richard was the third child, born in 1884 to blacksmith's hammer man John and wife Jane, also from a family of iron workers. Although the infant Richard would probably not have noticed, 55 Forge Street was probably quite cramped in his early years as twelve people, three generations, lived there in a house with five rooms – a common feature in the industrial development of the valleys.

The turn of the century marked the decline of the iron industry in the Rhymney valley, with coal supplanting it, and by 1901 Richard had followed his father John, now an underground roadman, to the coal face as a coal hewer.⁹ Richard had another sister by this time and the family, all Welsh and English speakers, had moved to 40 Forge Street. Elder sister Jane was a schoolteacher and younger sister Mary was a domestic servant. A third sister, Margaret Ann - my grandmother - would soon be married and starting a family of her own.

Whether in search of adventure or a way out of the pits, the declaration of war in 1914 lured Richard, amongst many others, to sign up at Newport for army service, with the 4th Battalion South Wales Borderers (4th SWB). He was just shy of twenty nine years old and still living with his parents in Rhymney. He was, as the

⁵ 1881 Wales Census for John Evans, at No 55, Forge Street (Monmouthshire/Bedwellty/Tredegar/District 35).

⁶ 1861 Wales Census for Thomas Evans, at Quarry Row (No 181 on Schedule) (Monmouthshire/Bedwellty/Tredegar/District 19)

⁷ 1841 Wales Census for Thomas Evans, at Plantation Field (Monmouthshire/Bedwellty/Tredegar/District 25).

⁸ 1851 Wales Census for Thomas Evans, at Puddlers Arms Row (No 100 on Schedule) (Monmouthshire/Bedwellty/Tredegar/District 21)

⁹ 1901 Wales Census for Richard Evans, at No.40 Forge Street (Monmouthshire/Rhymney/District 33).

saying goes, no bigger than a bar of soap at five foot three - and a half - and just under nine stone, so not a big man.¹⁰

It was at this point in the research I had the most amazing stroke of good fortune. Although millions of WWI service records were destroyed in the Blitz, I found Richard's service record virtually intact (albeit a bit charred around the edges), giving details of his WWI service. Using this and the Battalion war diaries amongst other sources I was able to reconstruct his, and his Battalion's, wartime movements. *More*

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These snippets taken from three articles are intended to give readers an idea of the content, style and range of material included in Journal 24. Readers can continue reading these articles, and others, by downloading the complete Journal for £3.00.

¹⁰ British Army WWI War Service Records, 1914-1920 for Richard Evans - New Army Short Service (Three years with the Colours) Attestation of 4/13084 Richard Evans, dated 26th August 1914.

