



Gair y Ddraig

The Word of the Dragon

Rhagfyr, 2020
December, 2020

CALGARY WELSH
SOCIETY
FOUNDED: 1906



We hope you enjoy this *Christmas Special Edition* of *Gair y Ddraig*!

We have invited members to share some of their personal stories, and the latest news that may be of interest.

This time of social distancing and extra-care places unusual burdens on individuals and society in so many ways. So, we invite you to help '*lighten the load*' by sharing your stories, photographs, jokes, and activities that help see you through each day.

This issue invites you into the lives of some members. It also includes humour which is so important in times of difficulty and stress.

A HUGE thanks to all those who have contributed to this newsletter.

NADOLIG LLAWEN I CHI GYD!!

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GREETINGS FROM YOUR CALGARY WELSH SOCIETY BOARD

Annwyl Ffrindiau/ Dear Calgary Welsh Society Friends.

WE HOPE YOU ENJOY this Christmas edition of our newsletter.

We will miss our Christmas Brunch this year, as we have missed all our events since St. David's Day. We are still hoping that we will be able to celebrate and gather next year.

Some good news, the North American Welsh Choir, *Cor Gogledd America* is scheduled once again, this time for June, 2021.

We know that it has been a difficult year for everyone. This winter seems to have arrived early, good news for the winter sports people among us. And yet, we are experiencing the occasional, unseasonally warm day

Thanks to those members who submitted articles for this newsletter, and to David for editing. Please send any ideas or thoughts you may have to David.

Thanks to Jane Thomas who has requested the City, to have the flag flying, and several places lit in red, white and green, for St. David's Day.

With the latest precautions in place, we hope that you are able to celebrate in someway at Christmas.

Take Care and Keep Safe.

“Nadolig Llawen a Blwyddyn Newydd Dda!”

On behalf of the Board

Margaret Freedman.



CHRISTMAS PUDDINGS AND OTHER MEMORIES

I REMEMBER that towards the end of October, one Saturday was set aside for making of the Christmas Puddings.

My mother would prepare the puddings, then nearby family would all come in and everyone would stir the mixture. It was then placed in 7 pudding basins and wrapped in cloth, forming a handle.

The next morning the boiler would be brought into the kitchen and the puddings steamed all day.

Once they were ready, the cloths were removed and a thin slice cut from each (these were the tasters). Then rewrapped and stored in the pantry until Christmas Day. Two puddings were exchanged with 2 of my mother's sisters, who all had their own recipes! We always declared ours were the best, which probably happened at each home! Never really sure, looking back, why we needed so many puddings, did the 4 of us actually eat them all? Maybe some went to the sisters who didn't make puddings.

Another thing that happened about a month before Christmas was that Dad, who worked for the Post Office, would sort mail on the mail train travelling to Bristol from Swansea every night. He would leave around 9 pm, travel to London, and only come into Swansea Station, every other night. So Mam, my brother and I would go to the Station to meet the train, buy a platform ticket, take him his sandwiches and tell him the news. We only had about 15 minutes or so. Then we would wave the train off. He returned home Christmas Morning around 4 am just in time for us to be waking up to see what Santa had brought.

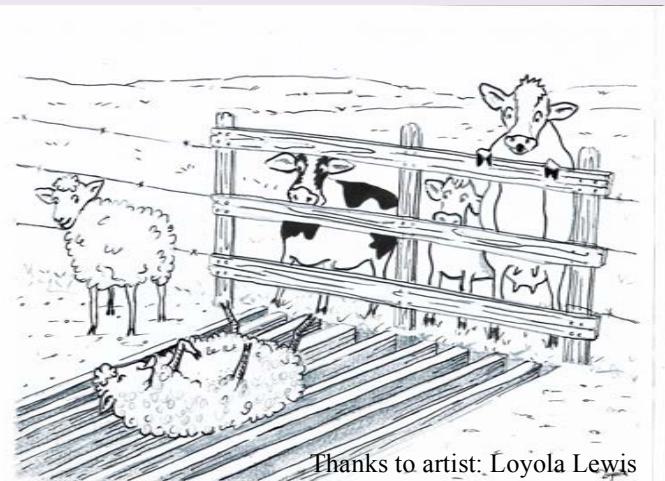
Margaret Freedman



WELSH SHEEP – checking the facts with Brian Lewis

FOR MANY YEARS COLLIERs in South Wales tried to grow vegetables in their small back gardens. Their biggest challenge was sheep. No obstacle could stop them invading gardens. The colliers blamed the farmers for not keeping them fenced in. The farmers said barbed wire was too expensive, but they'd repair the dry stone walls.

In recent years, despite many efforts to control them, sheep continued to wander wherever they wanted to go. They have been observed to climb over walls with the agility of mountain goats. It's also been confirmed that to cross cattle grids they have learned to make themselves into a ball and roll over. It seems that Welsh sheep, are smarter than we thought.



Thanks to artist: Loyola Lewis

Communication in Sensation

Cyfathrebu yn Sensation

this is a declaration of love, shamanist
in the lost name of a colour which no longer exists
in the language beyond words to express—

I stand breathless in the doorway
at the hospice, the portal to bardo
between the blurred lines of birth and death
in the place that holds no time
just Nain

my Grandma, Nain in Welsh
a hundred and one and a half
laughs in the face of her epitaph
and then asks me to join her
on her journey through death, cryfder
I say: absolutely—
yes

we begin
the dance of marwolaeth
we do not know the steps
and yet, we dance, we dance
ddaeār y gwaed
as we live life Nain and I follow
the lines as they are given

we move forward
dip our toes into the other side
as if to test imaginations crest
like the Holy Head coastline tide
and then, we return to this realm
half glorified, to catch our breath
no time between our stars

we know we do not know where we are going
she reaches her boney hands
into the twilight hour, up, up
tells me: it's snowing, it's snowing—
I see her taste frozen light on her tongue
in a language betwixt and between

when I was young,
she taught me to tie my laces,
to tell time, and sound out each letter

now, she shows me how to walk through yn
marw
and speaks in the language of soul
we share eyes, surrender control
and then we dance again
dip our feet into the other side
and return, again, fortified

next we go deeper into death
up to our ankles, our shins, our thighs
no time between our stars
until we are magnified Pleiades

we know where we are going
we are waist deep
and then, up to our necks
in death

Nain looks over and into me
with her final breath
and exits in a language of the sea
I know instantly, what she is saying
I don't want her to leave
I don't want her to leave me
she tells me mind-to-mind, to mind
it's time she goes on without me, hedfan fly
ffarwél

music of the unknown wonders cry
ffarwél, as she leaves her spirit with me
for safe-keeping
I hear a million hynafol voices speaking
in languages lost to my people
weeping, end of oak Celtiberian-ease
and stones, end of wind and bardic poems
crossbones scattered across the earth
in llwch i'r llwch, tones
ffarwél

to the natural world
word linguafranca of birds heard-pictures
oneiric, names of ways of seeing and being
honeycomb—hieroglyphic pic's, alphabetic
scripts,
all connected to this earth in metaphysics
musica universalis metamorphosis.....

symbols of symbols of cyphers of signs
coded in code encoded in storylines
love is a dangerous threat
glottophagy linguicide
when the last speaker
of a language dies

the last words of Nain
grow distant and pale almost thin, they grow thin
as the human skin
one hundred years frail
becomes Cain paper
becomes a spider web thread
in the hail

sometimes I am the language
that lost its last speaker
not misunderstood, erased
deleted by a friend
impossible to comprehend
maybe that is what leads me to poetry

the words of Nain
are distant now thinner somehow
no time between our stars
naill ai

©Sheri-D Wilson



In Memory of Mabon Jones by Brian Lewis

FOR THIS YEAR'S VIRTUAL NAFOW there was an invitation for entries into an English or Welsh poetry contest.

From 1940 – 1947 I lived in the coal-mining village of Gilfach Goch in South Wales. One of my most vivid memories was hearing the colliery hooter blast, signalling disaster underground. Nearly everyone in my class had a father, grandfather, brother or uncle working down the pit. At once our teacher would quietly say, "Pens down, books away, follow me", and we'd gather near the pithead while the rescuers assembled.

My poem is based on a real rescuer. It was not a winning entry but I thought it worth while sharing with members who may have had similar memories.

In Memory of Mabon Jones

Mabon Jones, the collier strongman, singer of some fame
For fifty years beneath this granite slab has lain.
Colliers still tap this rock in honour of his name
And stay awhile to sing some Welsh refrain.

Everyone admired him for his strength and pluck.
He was always swift to muster when disaster struck:
The first to comfort all the women gathered round,
Tearful for their men trapped underground.

Despair, his booming voice dispelled with song,
So hope swept through the shawled and silent throng:
For hope makes coinage to dispatch despair
And kindly uses it with loving deeds and care.

Through many a rock fall when everything looked grim
Mabon kept digging whatever the risk to him.
And to those Welshmen he often found alive
He'd say "It's hope, boys, hope! It's how us Welsh survive."



WHY DID I JOIN THE CALGARY WELSH SOCIETY?

By Glynis Grigg

WHEN ASKED THAT QUESTION the obvious answer seemed to be “Because I’m Welsh”. There had to be more to it than that.

My first encounter with the organization was when my elderly uncle, Bob Parry, asked me to attend a Calgary Welsh Society Christmas dinner with him. I duly did chauffeur duty and off we went to Fort Calgary for a very enjoyable evening. The next events I attended with Uncle Bob were to hear visiting choirs. He always asked that we arrive early enough to sit in the centre seats of the first row of the balcony – we did and from which we enjoyed the fabulous entertainment. My uncle was “Pleased as Punch” and I was hooked ! Unfortunately, an accident prevented him from continuing his association with the Welsh Society but a family friend, David G., encouraged me and my husband to join and we agreed.

I now feel closer to my roots and, as an added bonus, I have found a group of people who do not have to be told “Think Guinness, with an L after the G”, when asked how to pronounce my name. I may also finally learn to properly pronounce my father’s birthplace as noted on my Birth Certificate: **Llanfairpwllgwyngyllgogerychwyrndrobwllllantysiliogogogoch** – or maybe, I’ll just stay with Llanfair P.G.



ZOO LIGHTS: a visit to the extraordinary display of Christmas lights and décor...



THE RISE AND FALL AND RISE AGAIN OF THE WELSH LANGUAGE - 4000 YEARS OF HISTORY ...continued.....Heather Powell

THE RISE AGAIN

- With the Reform Act of 1867, males of more households entitled to vote in British elections. In Wales, Plaid Cymru, (The Party of Wales), was established in 1925 with the explicit aim to make Wales Welsh speaking and making Welsh the official language in Wales. Winning its first seats in parliament in 1966. It was not until 1918 that Universal Suffrage was granted.
- The Fate of the Language lecture by Saunders Lewis in 1962 had a monumental effect on Welsh-speaking Welsh people. He called them to action asking them to refuse to pay bills or interact with authorities unless they could do it through the medium of Welsh. Protests continued from this time.
- In 1964 the Office of Secretary of State for Wales was created.
- The Welsh language act of 1967 gave some rights to the use of Welsh in legal proceedings in Wales. There had been a relaxation in the law in 1942 when Welsh people appearing in court could use the Welsh language if they were disadvantaged by speaking in English.
- In 1982 the Welsh Language Society (Cymdeithas yr Iaith) published their manifesto in which they campaigned for the right for Welsh people to use the Welsh language in every facet of their lives. A direct action group, they cause disruptions to get their message heard and are considered Britain's largest protest group.
- Other milestones have come about quickly in the last 20 years or so.
1988 Education Reform Act,
1990 Welsh was phased in as a compulsory subject for most school children.
1992 the Welsh Language Bill gave Welsh equal status with English in all public bodies
1993 Welsh Language made Welsh the official language in the public sector
1997 Welsh devolution narrowly voted in 1997
1998 Government of Wales Act (1998) provided for the establishment of the National Assembly for Wales.
2011 Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011 act passed. More far reaching laws stating that Welsh should be treated no less favourably than the English language in Wales



THE FUTURE - Miliwn o Siaradwyr

In 2017 the strategy, "Cymraeg 2050" - A Million Welsh Speakers was launched by the Welsh Government. Launched on the 50th anniversary of the Welsh Language Act 1967.

Vision: "The year 2050: The Welsh language is thriving, the number of speakers has reached a million, and it is used in every aspect of life. Among those who do not speak Welsh there is goodwill and a sense of ownership towards the language and a recognition by all of its contribution to the culture, society, and economy of Wales"

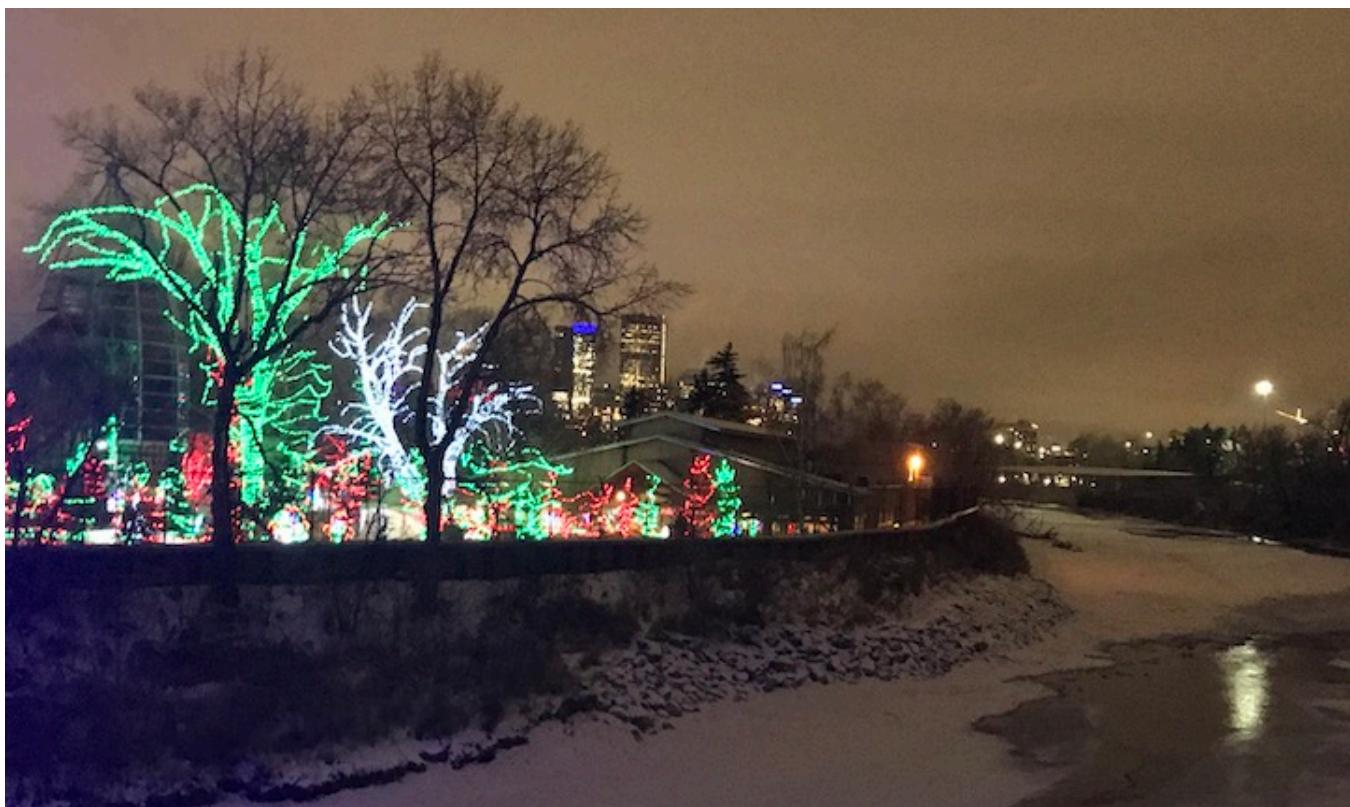
For the year ending March 2019 28.33% of the population aged 3 and over were able to speak Welsh. This equates to 855,200 people. Presently the highest percentage of Welsh speakers can be found in Gwynedd (75%) and Anglesey (66%).

Closing: "The Welsh language is one of the treasures of Wales. It is part of what defines us as people and as a nation" (Ministers' foreword in the paper for Cymraeg 2050).

DANISH – WELSH CONNECTIONS. THE STORY OF NAN DAVIES

MY NAME IS NAN DAVIES, I was born in a small town in Denmark called Brøndum where my family had a small farm. I'm the only child of Dagmar and Frode Olesen. Now you wonder, what could I possible have in common with Wales?

As I grew up I always wanted to travel, but not too far at first. I decided that I would start out spending one year in Norway at seventeen years of age. I wanted to learn the English language, so I thought, what better place then London, England. I had found a job in *The Danish Club* in London. Getting there was not so easy. I took a train from Hobro, Denmark to Esbjerg and then crossed the water to Harwich and again took a train to London where someone from *The Danish Club* met me. Today I wonder how I did that without knowing a word of English. I quickly learned the English language and loved every minute of my stay in England. My supervisor was from Denbigh, North Wales and she wanted to show me Wales at Christmas time. It was 1971 and I had a wonderful experience there. Mostly because I met my husband, Kelvin Davies that Christmas holiday on Boxing day. Soon after we met we moved to Denmark. We stayed there for three years and our son, Martin was born. Some time later we were on the go again. This time Canada was our goal and we arrived in 1975. We wanted to stay for two years and, well, I'm still here. We added a little girl to the family and called her Kristina. Kelvin and I and our children also spent some wonderful years in various countries of South America. I think some of you know my granddaughter Jane who, at times, entertains us with her singing just like they do in Wales.



THE SEARCH FOR THE HOUSE OF MY WELSH GRANDMOTHER

by Kathleen Johnson

WHEN I BOOKED THE TRIP ON A BIT OF A WHIM during my last days of a 30-something woman, I felt pretty adventurous! I was taking back the backpack hostel trip I had cancelled so many years earlier with my friend, Judy. I can admit now to having a few thoughts of wanting to carry that spirit of adventure and independence forward and strike out entirely on my own. Turning my sights to being in a warm home with kind people, that desire changed. What an incredible opportunity it would be to stay with real Welsh families and get to know true Welsh people, David Matthews' family.

My heart changed and so too did my vision of the perfect trip. Little did I know then, these folks would not only enhance my trip (and help drastically with my budget... thank you thank you thank you!), they would become everything that was good and memorable about this once in a lifetime trip.

I cry as I write this. After '17' divorces, [editor's comment: Wow! Kathleen!] it takes a lot to make me cry now and yet, 9 years on, here I am crying over my keyboard as I think of one special woman. Her name... was Maggie.

Side note: *If I burn out this keyboard, I'll have to write by hand, and no one wants that. So I'll get it together here and type, though now I can barely see. This was not my first hosting in Wales by David's family I simply cannot share about that trip though, without sharing with you about Maggie. I loved her the moment I met her. Through this story, I hope you will get to know Maggie. If, of course, you didn't already have that blessing.*

Before the trip, David shared that I will be quite pleased to learn that his sister, Maggie, lived in Carmarthen not far from where my dear Welsh Grandma, Lois, was born. I was over the moon at the thought to be so close! I learned that Maggie lived in something they call "Council Housing". Oh my! How exciting. That sounded very fancy indeed! I'm not a snob though, so I put that information in my back pocket and focused on the trip.

Maggie lives with her daughter, Cecilia, who was away in Africa so I would have her bedroom. So kind! Maggie's partner Tony is also lovely I heard and so I was excited to arrive and be met by this wonderful couple in Carmarthenshire! The county of a full 25% of my heritage! My heart was full, and my Grandma felt so close.

I'm trying to recall the order of everything now and am not sure of how I came to be on Maggie's doorstep after a great ride on the bus from Cardiff. There I was though, and here was Maggie. I learned in that moment, that a person meeting Maggie could not help but love her. Perhaps the only match would be that of my Grandma Lois who drew me here in the first place. My Grandma who gave me my lifelong love of Wales, for she had truly the kindest of souls as well. I love that these two women both knew Carmarthenshire as their homes. *[Just for the record I am now bawling my eyes out as I share this with you, good people. Happily crying about absolutely joyful memories.]*

Now a very mature 40-year-old (40 yes, mature no), I arrived at Maggie's dear home. I was by then further educated on local terminology and felt even more humble and grateful to be invited to share in Maggie's home, a row house, with a sweet frontage with a border garden just waking up from winter. Tony (a true gentleman whom it was impossible not to be fond of) took my bags to my borrowed bedroom and then the three of us gathered in Maggie's clean, tidy very Welsh kitchen.



We shared tea and a pastry together and we all just talked and settled easily and warmly into one another's company. Clearly brought entirely up to speed by her brother, David, Maggie and Tony had set to work to help me learn more about my Grandma and my family's home. If I was determined to find my Grandma's home, Maggie, Tony and David were more so!

We chatted excitedly then stepped out through the kitchen to the big backyard and my breath was taken away. Maggie's home overlooked a beautiful valley and historic church. This is where I first learned of the murmuration of starlings as vast groups of the black birds danced across the sky, turning en masse waving and flowing through the air like a living painting. It was a magical place, this little council home of Maggie's.

My first morning, Maggie and Tony took me directly to the local records office. The TV show "*Who do you think you are*" was happening right here, care of Maggie and Tony. In the bright basement of this historical building, I was presented by the kind staff with maps and books and registers. The amount of information is overwhelming and fascinating. We managed to find clues to where Grandma lived before emigrating to Canada so many years ago. Historical maps of Cross Hands and Cefneithen were very helpful indeed! However, considered against the changes that had happened in the community over the years, it wasn't going to be as simple as one might think to find that birth home, if it even still existed. Thumbing through microfiche and newspapers, I was hit by a sudden almost desperate impulsion to get outside and see this beautiful place Grandma called home.

Maggie was a great driver but it seemed from the conversation between she and Tony that she was a bit nervous to take me on her own to explore Cross Hands and Cefneithen. I never want to put anyone out but Maggie absolutely insisted she take me. And take me, she did! We received directions from their friend Gareth which was terrific. However, hard though we tried, we got lost and ended up right in the wee village of Cefneithen.

I was so focused on finding the family home, it was wonderful to become aware of all that was right in front of me! The elementary school that my beloved Aunts and Uncles had to have attended, along with Grandma. The main street itself dripping in time that has passed. This is where my family lived, worked, worshipped and learned. Right here. I was looking so hard for their home and here it was – all around me, thanks to Maggie!

We noticed a church with a graveyard. The year before Grandma was born, a boy had been born, and quickly passed. I had it in my mind to try to find this baby's gravesite if possible, to honour his passing. Seeing the church in this tiny town, we tried checking the gravestones but we had no luck. [Note to others: *It's a good idea to take a moment to learn that your family's church is actually the one across town... not this one.*]

While walking around the pretty little church (*yes... the wrong church*), a couple approached us to lend a hand. They were responsible for the church grounds. Unable to help with finding the baby's burial spot (*though they did try for a while to find it... sorry... wrong church*), but they were quite sure they knew the house!

They kindly led us to the place, but when the neighbours came out, they listened and determined we were still in the wrong place. Undeterred, Maggie called their friend Gareth for help on those directions.



...to be continued.....