

# BRYNMAWR HISTORICAL SOCIETY

# NEWS UPDATE

**November/December 2020.**

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I start with an apology. Back in the July News Update in the article about Roy Francis I incorrectly heard that his wife's name was Renee but it should be Irene, my apologies to the family. There is a new article about Roy Francis on the website including some photos. There have been other additions to our website, there's Vol 2 of the News Update, there's an essay titled "Memories of Llanelly Hill" written by William Williams in 1970 and a very interesting piece about Sidney John Grant who was born and lived in Hatter Street, Brynmawr, served with the RAF before he emigrated with his family to Australia in 1948. Many thanks to the contributors.

Following the Oct/Nov News Update Vol 2, I have been contacted by Vivienne from the museum to confirm that the early rugby club did meet at the Bear. She says: "The last landlord of The Bear was known locally as "Jack the Bear" and I believe the room the Rugby Club used for changing was the large one above the garage which had an adjoining bathroom. Following its closure as a hotel, Doctor Chopra leased it from the Duke of Beaufort on a 21 year lease. He used the front four rooms as his surgery and my parents rented the rest of the accommodation using the kitchen at the rear of the building and all the first floor rooms (the room over the garage was our sitting room), I was born and brought up there". Thanks for that Vivienne. I also found confirmation that their first playing field was where ASDA now dominates; it was actually earmarked for housing roughly about the same time as Twyncynnordy was being planned. This from the Brecon Gazette in 1914: "*The Twyncynnordy field has recently been surveyed and it is calculated that at least 200 houses can be erected upon this site. Similar steps have also been taken in regard to the old*

*Rugby football field on the Nantyglo road, where it is said there is sufficient ground for 60 houses*". Since then there have been numerous houses and estates built in Brynmawr but for some reason we still call Twyncynnordy "the new houses" Now, this name Twyncynnordy, spelt correctly in the above newspaper article but somehow has become Twyncyngordy or Twyncynghordy, that small difference of g instead of an n or the addition of "h" has changed the meaning of the word and now is often said to mean "Meeting place of the Council" leading many to believe that ancient Celtic tribes would meet there to discuss trade and complain about the weather. The word should be cynnordy as on an old map I found there is a Cwm Cynnordy, difficult to say where it flowed but it may well be the stream that fed the swimming pool. I need to do more work on this.

Roy Fowler (one of our committee members) emailed to say that he remembers the rugby team changing in The Railway pub. There's a pub that's had a few names, The Railway, Goose and Firkin, Grasshoppers, now it's an empty shell.

I had a request for some information about Trafalgar House which stand on the corner of Alma Street and Pound Road. (I know some people now call it Trafalgar Road but the original name was Pound Road as there was an animal pound there and I think names should be preserved). Anyway, after some digging I found that the House was originally a private residence built sometime after 1880 but had been taken over in 1913 by the Brynmawr District council. The Brecon County Times, Neath Gazette and General of 1st January 1914 reported that a "New public offices were opened at Brynmawr by Councillor E. Swales,

*J.P., chairman of the Brynmawr District Council. A well known private residence, Trafalgar House had been acquired and considerably altered at an approximate cost of £1,100. There are in the new building rooms for meetings of the district council, and the district education authority, as well as clerk and surveyors' offices. Speeches were made by County Councillor William Evans, (and others), Mr John Thomas (clerk), Mr D. Gibson Harris, and Dr. J. L. Thomas".* The John Thomas (clerk) mentioned would have been the grandfather of Miss Doubleday. I'm sure many of you remember her.

The first caretaker appointed in 1913 was Police Sergeant Price; he had resigned his position in the Breconshire Constabulary after 32 years' service, 15 of which had been spent at Brynmawr.

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In the excellent books about Brynmawr and Nant y Glo by Edwin Jones and Trevor Rawson there is a mention and photographs of two mountain fighters from Llanelly Hill training with their "seconds". I've been interested in prize fighting and for many years have looked for some evidence of this "sport" taking place in Brynmawr, this was a town that suffered greatly during the depression and fighting was a way of getting money. During lockdown I have had time to thoroughly go through some newspapers and what a trove I found.

Brynmawr had quite a few prize fighters and to name only some of them there was: William Williams, Daniel Williams (Butcher), David Thomas, alias "Spanker," James Richards, William Watkins and Joseph Huish. Some of the fights occurred spontaneously but others would be weeks of training and careful planning as to the site. Care had to be taken that the police didn't find out and very often a fight would be arranged on the border between two counties so if the police did come everybody would cross the border where they would be safe from arrest. The earliest report I could find was for 1867 as far as Brynmawr was concerned but obviously many took place before that date. It was quite common for a fight to start early in the morning again to try and escape arrest like this one "*A fight was arranged between John Thomas ("Jack the Lamb"), Beaufort, and William Marshall, Ebbw Vale, to come off at early dawn on Monday, on Domen-Fawr mountain, near Ebbw Vale. Some were up and ready by 3am"....*

*It would be quite common for a fight to last for three hours or more, but if the police got wind then the chances are one round is all you'd get as happened on Llangynidr Mountain.."* a large crowd of backers and others assembled on Llangynidr Mountain at an early hour on Sunday morning to witness a fight between John Huish and Daniel Williams (Butcher), of Brynmawr. Only two rounds had taken place when the approach of the police was observed and the gathering dispersed... And then sometimes you get a full report which shows that even the newspapers were informed of the fight as in this from the South Wales Daily news of 11<sup>th</sup> of September 1889: "*Early on Tuesday a prize fight occurred on the mountain near the" Bird-house," some distance from Brynmawr, between David Rees, of Nanty- Glo, and William Williams, of Brynmawr, for £10. The affair was kept quiet, although the combatants had for the past two weeks been preparing for the fight. Shortly after four o'clock a 24ft. ring was pitched on a nice bit of sward with a slope each side, so that the large number of people who attended could see the fight. Rees, who was about 20 pounds heavier than his opponent, was attended by Lloyd Roberts and Smith, a coloured man, two well known travelling boxers, whilst Williams was waited upon by two well-known local sportsmen. The fight through- out was well contested, but Williams always held the upper hand, although his opponent hit hard. At the close of the 42nd round Rees threw up the sponge, and Williams was declared the winner after a fight which lasted 1 hour and 27 minutes. The result was not satisfactory to a few, and a number of other fights ensued in consequence during the day".* Not everybody was happy the fight was over hence the number of other fights that flared up afterwards.

#### **More about prize fighting in a future issue.**

And finally, the committee agreed the Society would donate £100 to the Army Benevolent Fund via Nicholas Beswick's 100km walk. He raised a magnificent £600. Well done Nicholas. A special thanks to John Child who laid a wreath at the memorial on behalf of the society.

**Watch how you go and keep safe.**