

BRYNMAWR HISTORICAL SOCIETY

# NEWS UPDATE

**February/March 2021.**

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**By now some of you (possibly myself) will have had the vaccination which we hope will change things for the better as far as COVID is concerned. I do think that maybe, just maybe, if everyone had adhered to the rules of no gatherings etc we may well have beaten the virus. Still as one well known person said “there is one thing you can always depend on and that is some people’s stupidity and selfishness”.**

**We start this News Update with some help from Hywel Axford, a committee member and past Chairman of the society and I thank him for his kind words.**

Throughout the lockdown, our Secretary Eifion has kept the flag of the Brynmawr Historical Society flying with his bulletins. All members owe him a big thank you for his outstanding services over many years. Some members have helped him in his research, so I thought I would help with this bit of history although it is more connected to Blaina than Brynmawr.

One of our ever present members over the years, seldom missing a meeting is Don Griffiths of Brynteg, Blaina. During the days of the Old Hafodian Club he and I were members of a group of around a dozen who met on Friday nights and our discussions were far reaching and interesting

One Friday there was an extra face, it was Jim Gay, Don’s uncle who had spent many years in Derby working for Rolls Royce, he had retired home to Blaina, One of the group related a story of his military duty in India, when he met someone from Abertillery, Jim followed this up with the fact that he visited a pub in Derby, not long after arriving there to start

work, he was sat next to a gentleman of the road (tramp). I expect all our older members can remember the tramps passing through during the summer month. He obviously recognized Jim’s accent and asked “What part of Wales do you come from?” The reply was “From a little Welsh coal mining town which you would not have heard of, Blaina”.

“What” said the tramp, “I was there a few months back, chopping fire wood for Miss Athay the Head mistress.”

This story came back to me as I was reading an account of the development of education in Nantyglo and Blaina when I came across the following,

*Ellen Athay was appointed Head of the Blaina Girls school at a salary of £40 per annum on the 14th November 1882. Her house where the tramp chopped the fire wood is a few doors away from where Don is now living.*

If any of our members have similar stories then please send them in to be included in future issues.

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The following song (below) was sung by Mr. E. Bull, of Usk at the dinner to Crawshay Bailey M.P, chairman of the Coleford, Monmouth, Usk and Pontypool Railway to show their approval of the energetic, persevering, and valuable services he had rendered in surmounting every difficulty, so as to succeed in the face of the strongest opposition, in obtaining the act for making the Coleford and Pontypool line. **(I include the tune used in case you fancy singing along with Mr Bull).**

**P.S.** I came across it in the Monmouthshire Merlin, 16th September 1853

## Song of progress.

Sung to the tune: "The days that we went  
Gipseying, a long time ago".

Today we meet to celebrate the victory we have  
won,  
To thank the General of the fight, a truly gallant  
man,  
For since we have the Railway Bill in spite of  
faction's strife.  
Monmouth towns will take their place and gain a  
stronger life.

CHORUS. Nor at Coleford will we stop,  
but to Gloucester we will go,  
And next Session we will beat again,  
Brunel and all his crew.

With his ready purse and lion will, firm Bailey led  
the way,  
The Chairman of a faithful band, he said, we'll win  
the Day  
'Mong earnest friends to fight the fight from  
mountain land there came,  
One Thomas Brown, for enterprise well crowned  
with honest fame.

CHORUS. Nor at Coleford will we stop,  
but to Gloucester we will go,  
And next Session we must floor again the  
factious Western crew.

Usk gave her share of honest men, who, spite of toil  
and cost,  
Worked night and day, with watchful care, all ready  
at their post,  
There was Waddington, of legal fame, who drew  
the bill so well,  
And Greenhow Relph, for honest zeal, a match for  
sly Brunel.

CHORUS. Nor at Coleford will we stop,  
but to Gloucester we will go  
And next Session we must fight again the  
factious Western crew.

And Monmouth sent her quota too, good men of  
mark and fame  
With the foremost, Dyke and Wyatt, now our  
warmest praises claim,  
And the Engineer and Foresters, whose names I  
need not hail!  
You'll ne'er forget their merit while you travel by  
the rail;

CHORUS. Nor at Coleford will we stop,  
we must have a railway thro'  
From Pontypool to Gloucester, spite of all  
the factious crew.

But chief of all, hurrah for him, the evening's  
proudest toast,  
Who cheer'd and led the way to win, and proved  
himself a host.

Drink Bailey's health, with nine times nine my  
song of triumph sings.  
He's staunch and true, and honest too, the best of  
Iron Kings.

CHORUS. Nor at Coleford will we stop,  
we must have a railway thro'  
From Pontypool to Gloucester, spite of all  
the factious crew.

Crawshay Bailey is always associated with the  
Iron Works but in fact he was, as the song  
suggests involved in many fields. He sat and  
chaired numerous committees, many concerned  
with the improvement of local conditions. He  
had prudently moved into coal, buying up land  
knowing coal was available beneath. He had  
also invested in the railways, not just the  
Abergavenny to Merthyr line but railways in  
other valleys as far as Swansea and even the  
U.S.A. According to newspaper reports of the  
period he was a good employer and he  
expected all to work according to their ability.  
On one occasion when the Nant y Glo works  
was to stop due to a depression in the iron trade  
and the works were not profitable, he refused to  
close and said that he'd pay the workers out of  
his own pocket. He knew the terrible poverty  
that followed would affect his workers and  
families. He was repaid quite soon when the  
price of iron rose to its highest level ever. A  
gentleman who greeted all politely and when  
asked donated generously to religious  
movement. His final public appearance was  
placing the keystone for St Mary's Church at  
Brynmawr. (Sadly, that church was blown  
down). When he died, the funeral was to be a  
strictly private family occasion but many of his  
old workers walked from Nant y Glo,  
Brynmawr, and Beaufort etc down to Llanfoist  
where he's buried to pay their respects. Would  
they have done that if they thought of him as a  
cruel master, or was it to confirm he was dead?  
He lies alone and his ostler (I think) is buried  
next to him with a similar, but much smaller  
column marking the spot. **Maybe it's time to  
lay to rest that impression of Crawshay  
Bailey being a tyrant.** I'll put together a "Life  
of Crawshay Bailey" for our next News  
Update. In the meantime keep safe.

Secretary.