

Local History in the Making

By
Huw Daniel

Who would have thought that ten years ago a decision by Bridgend County Borough Council to run a local history class in the Berwyn Centre Nantymoel would have actually led to the institution that is the Ogmores Valley Local History & Heritage Society celebrating its first decade as a Society.

Without doubt the best decision Bridgend County Borough Council have made towards preserving the area's heritage for many, many years, though I doubt they envisaged quite what a mighty Oak they were sowing in the Spring of 1999.

It was the boundless enthusiasm of the founding members that meant that when the evening classes were drawing to a conclusion that not only did they want to continue their fortnightly doses of local history, but that the material they were accumulating should be somehow recorded for future generations. It was then they decided to publish a book of their work.

However a simple desire to see your work in print doesn't always transpire to a polished publication such as our annual "Journal", even if you have enough raw material to fill a publication, without a lot of hard work throughout the year and a large amount of money to initially finance such a project.

It was therefore decided very early in the discussions to form a "Society" with a properly constituted committee and so the "Ogmores Valley Local History & Heritage Society" was born and the first officers were duly elected/volunteered/press ganged (take your pick) into action.

The first officers were Trevor John, Chairman, John Evans, Treasurer, Julie Miller, Secretary and Jane Davies as the Editor and of course all the members of the former evening class as staunch supporters. It was this team but particularly our Treasurer John Evans that worked tirelessly to obtain a grant of £3,105 from the Heritage Lottery Fund, that would provide the essential capital to fund the very first Society's Journal and would also prove to be a substantial learning experience in dealing with grant making bodies that would provide us with an excellent foundation for the coming years and which would reap many successful applications for project funding that sees a total of £35,000 having been raised by the Society for our projects to date.

In March 2000, due to work pressures our first Secretary relinquished her post and Huw Daniel volunteered to take over the responsibilities, along with the role of Society Archivist, a key factor in both roles being that our new secretary was one of the few members owning a PC at that time, which would be an absolutely vital tool in the Society's future activities, but particularly in the digitisation and preservation of both paper based records and photographic images.

In the setting of the constitution and deciding the aims of the Society it was clear very early that the Society shouldn't just exist to research and publish annual Journals based on the members submissions, but that the Society should take an active part in preserving the history & heritage of the Ogmores Valley for future generations but too much is lost.

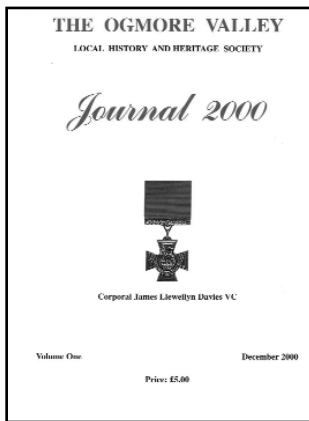


Aber Colliery Fan House c.1980

We all remembered the valiant efforts of the like minded group of individuals in the late 1970's who also tried to form a Local History Society in an attempt to preserve some of the fast disappearing heritage of the valley, with plans to try and save for the valley, the Ogmores Vale Workman's Hall, the derelict Ogmores Vale Train Station, the 16th Century Aber Farm, the Aber Colliery Fan House and the disused "Gwalia Stores". Their very forward thinking plan was to incorporate all these buildings (amongst others) in an "industrial tourist route" that would not only preserve them but actually bring much needed income to the area.

Sadly, their futuristic plan fell on deaf ears in the Council, who have now come complete circle and are desperate for "Historical" buildings to assist in their industrial heritage plans, but back in the 1970's and 1980's there was a mood prevalent within the Council that any old industrial building not in the most pristine of condition should be raised to the ground, and in this they were very successful in the Ogmore Valley, with the only building remaining from the ones listed above being the Aber Farm, though they even sold that off and it is now converted to a private dwelling.

So it was with that background in mind that we enshrined in our constitution that the preservation of records was paramount for the Society and that where possible any material we would be outputting would be aimed at the valley's future, it's children. With that in mind the Society built and has maintained very strong links with all the Valley's schools, principally through each school's head teacher or History coordinators and these are links we have very much maintained to the current day and even more so with the introduction of the Foundation Phase in Primary Schools which positively encourages the teaching of history at a local level, which bodes well for the future.



Journal 2000

So with funding in place and enough content to warrant a publication we set about designing our first publication, which after many discussions evolved into the format that we have stuck by for our first decade. The name was kept deliberately simple and right from the outset it is entirely made up from contributions from absolutely anyone with a story to tell about the Ogmore Valley and their connections with it or research articles on institutions or personalities within the valley.

We have since the first volume registered with the International Standard Book Number authorities and consequently deposit copies of our publications with The British Library, National Library of Wales, The Bodleian Library Oxford, The Cambridge University Library, The National Library of Scotland and The Library of Trinity College, Dublin. We also supply complimentary copies to Nantymoel Primary School, Ogmore Primary School, Ogmore Comprehensive School and Glamorgan Family History Society's Aberkenfig research centre.

We hold an annual book launch every November, which from 2000 to 2002 was held in the Berwyn Centre Nantymoel, but since 2003 we have held this community event in Ogmore Vale Primary School, by kind permission of the head teacher, Mr Paul Booth, B.A. (Hons), NPQH, where it continues to be a very successful annual event.

Our excellent link with Ogmore Vale Primary School is further demonstrated with the placing of three major projects within the school, namely the Ogmore Valley Timeline, the Ogmore Valley Archive and of course the Ogmore Valley Miners Memorial, which was erected and dedicated to all those men and boys who lost their lives in the valley's collieries between 1865 and 1983. The event we organised for the Miners Memorial on the 14th May 2004 was easily our biggest public event to date, with over 200 members of the public attending along with four local choirs, Ogmore Valley Male Voice Choir, The Ogmore Valley Ladies Choir, Nantymoel Primary School Choir and Ogmore Vale Primary School Choir, and uniformed and civilian representatives of all the emergency services including the South Wales Mines Rescue Service.



Pastor Brian Dallimore addresses the audience during the Miners Memorial Service 2004

We were also well supported by the Ogmore Valley Community Council, Bridgend Borough County Council, Mrs Janice Gregory, A.M., Ogmore, Huw Irranca-Davies, M.P., Ogmore, our special guest, Mrs Edwina Hart, MBE, AM, Welsh Assembly Minister for Regeneration and of course not forgetting representatives of Nantymoel Primary, Ogmore Primary and Ogmore Comprehensive Schools, which made the day a magnificent culmination of many years research by many members of the Society and members of the public. Fortunately Mr Owen Sendell captured the whole event on film so that we have a permanent reminder of the day.

It is with our most sincere thanks to all our funders over the years that we able to undertake a vital role in digitising any surviving Ogmore Valley Primary Source records whenever we have the opportunity. External financial support is critical in these digitisation projects as it can be a very costly exercise, as we use a professional scanning company, Archive CD Books Ltd of Cinderford, Gloucestershire and combined with the sheer volume of data, in excess of 20,000 pages for the Ogmore & Garw Urban District Council Minutes (1914 – 1978) for example, would be impossible to us to finance out of our funds.

It is also with our thanks to the holders of those records for loaning or even gifting them to the Society so that we can digitise them for the wider Ogmore Valley Community and family historians across the world with their roots from the Ogmore Valley who are then able to make use of these records in their research, which without the digitisation would be extremely hard to access or even impossible in some cases as they were destined for destruction.

To date we have successfully digitised the following records:

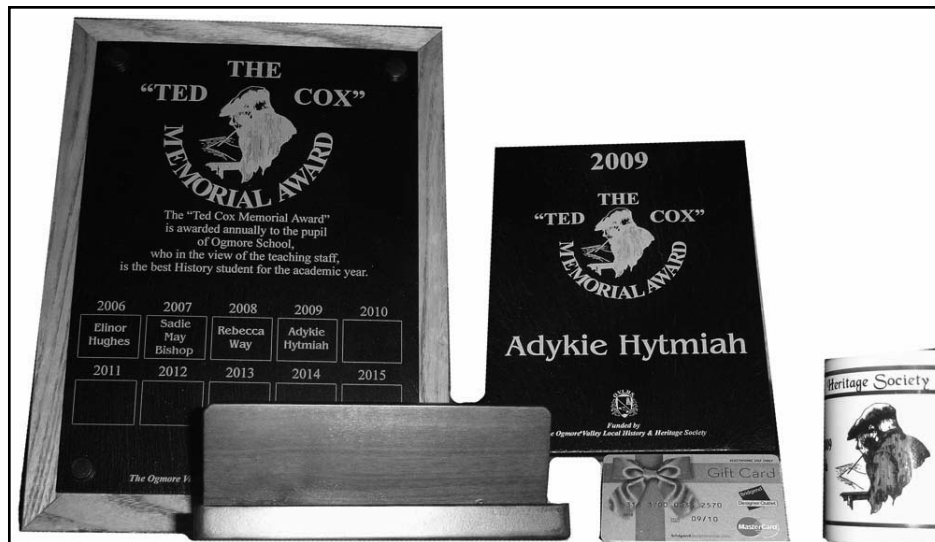
Llangeinor Parish Records (1755 - 1960)
Ogmore Valley Primary Schools Admission Records (1870 - 1960)
Ogmore Angling Association Records (1892 - 1942)
Share Holders Register of the Ogmore Valley Electric Light & Power Supply Co. Ltd. (1892 - 1944)
Transfer Ledger of the Ogmore Valley Electric Light & Power Supply Co. Ltd. (1892 - 1944)
Ocean Western Colliery Daily Contract Agreement Ledger (1905)
Wyndham Colliery Lodge supplementary Relief Account (1908 - 1923)
Rhondda Main Colliery Medical Fund Subscription Ledger (1914 - 1918)
Bethel Chapel BMD Register & History (1914 - 1988)
O. G. Hartland Work Quotes (1917 - 1919)
Centenary History of Glynogwr Church, translated by Mrs Heulwen Strathern (1919)
History of Horeb Chapel (1923)
Ogmore Valley Secondary School Admission Records (1923 - 1955)
Annual South Wales Baptist Meeting, Ogmore Vale (1925)
Fronwen School Year Book (1926)
Unveiling of Blackmill WM Memorial (1930)
Wyndham Colliery Banksman's Dispute (1933)
Ocean Coal Company Magazine (1934 - 1937)
Golden Jubilee of Nantymoel Workmens Hall (1952)
Joint Schools Gymanfu Ganu (1952 - 1956)
Unveiling of Nantymoel Memorial Clock Tower (1955)
Opening of Ogmore Valley Old Age Welfare Hall (1962)
Dedication of Nantymoel War Memorial Shelter (1958)
Dedication of Ogmore Workman's Hall Clocks in Memory of WWII (1958)

Naturally we also are very keen to digitise any photographic images that we are again, very graciously donated or loaned by their owners for our Digital Archive which now contains several thousand images of the Ogmore Valley and is literally growing daily.

Naturally as a consequence we needed a robust and secure system to hold this important archive and the Society's early decision to both join Bridgend Association of Voluntary Organisations and obtain Registered Charity status has reaped huge dividends as we have successfully applied on several occasions for upgrades to our IT equipment which now sees our archive held on a standalone 2TB Western Digital Hard Drive (arranged in 2 x 1TB raid Array for the technical savvy amongst you), with a Sony VAIO VGN-AW11S Laptop which has a Blu-Ray drive that we utilise as a secondary backup with Blu-ray Discs able to hold a massive 25GB or 50GB per disk.

We also use the laptop and the recently purchased Sony VPL-EX5 Projector when giving talks to other groups and we have plans to start showing selected images from our vast archive to the public in both Nantymoel and Ogmore from October this year.

Our members have also supported the Primary Schools over the years by giving talks on their life experiences with Harry Radcliffe, Bert Jones, Trevor John and Wendy Vaughan all taking part in helping to educate the valleys children. Wendy is also currently building very strong links with the new head of Nantymoel Primary School, Mrs Ann Jones, as Local History forms an important part of the recently introduced Foundation Phase.



The "Ted Cox" Award

We haven't neglected our Secondary Schools pupils and since 2006 the Society have been pleased to sponsor the "Ted Cox Award", for the best history student in year 7 or 8 pupils as part of Ogmores Comprehensive School's annual Mayor's awards, in an attempt to encourage an interest in local history in the older age groups.

The future, to quote a mobile phone advert, may not be Orange, but it is indeed very bright, we have after several years of negotiations finally have agreement to digitise the surviving Llandyfodwg Parish Records which will complete the Primary Source records available for the Ogmores Valley and will be a major help for any valley researchers out there.

We have also completed our Military Deaths Journal, listed all those personnel from the valleys killed whilst serving for the crown or as a result of enemy action, we are simply awaiting a grant to finance the publication as we intend to give a copy free to all the school children of the Valleys three schools as we did with our 2004 Mining Deaths 1865 – 1983 Journal.

Over the last few years we have enjoyed excellent support from the Ogmores Valley Community Council, Mrs Janice Gregory Assembly Member for Ogmores and Huw Irrancca-Davies Member of Parliament for Ogmores and are currently partnering the Community Council in a project to improve the area in the vicinity of the Nantymoel Memorial Clock Tower and also involved in the Bridgend County "Blue Plaque" project chaired jointly by Huw Irrancca-Davies MP and Madeline Moon MP.

We have and will continue to champion the Ogmores Valley whenever we have the opportunity, though our experience over the first decade, particularly in County Councils publications and websites is usually that the Ogmores Valley seemingly doesn't exist in any of their Heritage information or plans and that nothing of importance ever happened in the valley. Fortunately as those that have been loyal readers of our annual Journal over the years, we know differently and all the members of the Society can be justly proud of the volume and quality of information that is now available on our forgotten valley.

The heavy and dangerous industry of Coal Mining that once formed a major part of the valleys landscape may have been virtually eradicated from sight, and the valley is resplendent in all its green magnificence but thanks to the efforts Ogmores Valley Local History Society and our loyal members over the years, a large portion of our valleys rich and interesting heritage has been preserved for all our future generations.

Indeed, despite the fact that in Bridgend County Borough Council they seem to think that the Ogmores Valley shut up shop in 1983, there is a strong community that also have very strong family connections in every continent of the known World as evidenced every year when we despatch our eagerly awaited Journal to the four corners of the globe and also shown in the facts that "Ogmores People" have been present at some of the Worlds major events over the years or that products of the valleys schools go on to achieve greatness in their chosen fields.

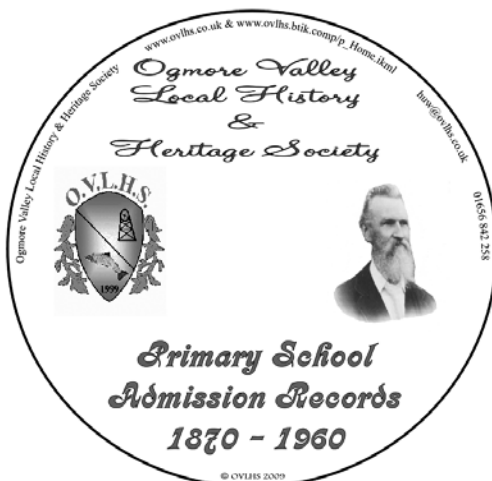
The joy of our Society and through the medium of our Annual Journal is that we also tell the story of the ordinary person, those who through circumstances or personal choice lived their entire lives surrounded by Mynydd Aber, Mynydd William Meyrick and Bwlch-y-clwadd, but nonetheless also have an interesting tale to tell of their time in this green clad valley of ours.

The Officers and Members of the Society would like to most sincerely like to thanks those members who in recent years have made significant financial contributions to the Society, and it really isn't an understatement so say that without their intervention we would have been unable to publish the Society's Journal for the last two years.

On reflection it has been a very busy but extremely rewarding first decade, where we have not only learned a great deal about the Heritage of this small piece of land we write about, but it has essentially been a fun journey, sometimes tinged with occasional sadness when we lose one of our members.

A particular joy are our regular fortnightly meetings, not the stuffy rooms of academia you may traditionally think inhabited by historians, (even keen amateur ones), but a friendly open discussion from a dedicated like-minded group of individuals with a steely determination when it's required, to preserve our common heritage before it disappears forever, not only for today's generation, but for the future generations who have no choice but to trust that we will continue to preserve their past for them.

Finally, we would gladly like to see you at our meetings as everyone really is welcome, no matter what age, though we do ask if your planning a bus load to let us know in advance, though we do appreciate that for many of our readers this may be physically impracticable, though you may be with us in spirit. However wherever you are in the world, you can still help by perhaps submitting an article of your own or perhaps suggesting a topic for a future article so that we can carry on recording the valleys heritage in our Journal which is the envy of many society's and with all your support will continue to go from strength to strength.



Primary Source Data DVDs Available from the Society