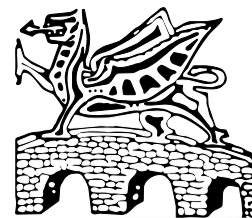


CHELMSFORD and DISTRICT WELSH SOCIETY



DECEMBER NEWSLETTER/ CYLCHLYTHYR MIS RHAGFYR 2020



President Chatter December

Annwyl Gyfeillion

What fantastic news this week, there is light at the end of the tunnel and it is not a train coming the other way. The vaccine is here and we can confidently plan ahead for 2021. Personally I can't wait to see our Society up and running again.

In the meantime we can keep in touch through the Newsletter, please keep your contributions coming. I was delighted when Gwenno told me to keep my chatter short.

Carys and I wish you all a Merry Christmas and a Happy Healthy New Year, Nadolig Llawn a Blwyddyn Newydd Iach a Hapus.

Cofion cynnes
Arthur

Best wishes to **Meinir Wyn Davies** for a speedy recovery following her recent operation at Southend Hospital.

Wishing everyone a very happy Christmas and a healthy New Year



Enid and John Morris and Mary Jones.

Hello to all! Firstly and most importantly we take this opportunity to wish each and everyone of you a very **Happy Christmas**.

Probably like Roger and I you are wondering just which way to go! Should we have all the family, or like so many are thinking.....should we let this one pass! Hopefully by the time this goes to press we will have reached our decision to encompass the family and be happy with it.

Who would have ever thought last February that we heading for such turmoil? With so much to look forward to within the Society e.g. our monthly meetings which to us are always such a joy. The eagerly awaited trip up to North Wales and of course the not to be missed wonderful concert in June. How sad it has been that we have not been able to fulfil any of it. BUT what a joy it has been when an email from Gwenno drops into the IN box with our monthly newsletter containing so many interesting bits and pieces. We have enjoyed reading them all and keeping up to date.

Amidst all the turmoil and when regulations allowed, Roger and I were able to enjoy a break in the New Forest in July and another in Devon in September. We have a touring caravan and generally only visit small sites and so we felt quite safe. During both holidays and armed with OS maps we did more than our fair share of walking! The New Forest was glorious at that time, very, very quiet and enjoyable, as of course was North Devon. One of the walks we did in Devon was down.....quite literally!!! To a place called Woody Bay, we are sure that lots of you will know it. However, it had been recommended and so we thought we must give it a try. It took us 45 minutes to walk down but oh my goodness more than twice as long to come back, we were almost crawling! And my legs certainly let me know all about it for the next two days!! Never again.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank Gwenno very much for furnishing us with the newsletter each month. It takes a lot of sorting and arranging and we are very grateful.

Well this leaves me to say once again to all of you. Have a very **Happy Christmas** whichever way you decide to spend it and we wish you all a very **Happy, Healthy and Peaceful New Year**. There does seem to be light at the end of the very dark tunnel, so let's all hope and pray that we will very soon be able to go about our daily lives more freely. We hope to see you all very soon.

Roger and Sandra Read

Church Services

Little did we realise the St. David's Day Service at Little Baddow United Reform Church was to be our last meeting for this year, with not only the Summer Service but also The Songs of Praise in October cancelled.

We can only HOPE that the viral situation will improve and LIFE will gradually return to Normal - whatever Normal will be!!!!

"HOPE Springs Eternal" - "Gobaith yn tarddu tragwyddol"

"Keep Safe and enjoy Christmas" – "Cymerwch ofal a mwynhewch y Nadolig"

"Great is the Mystery of Faith" - "Mawr yw dirgelwch fydd"

"CHRISTMAS"

Closer now the Star so Bright

Happiness surrounds that Bless-ed night

Rich and Poor bend knee to THE Child

In a manger asleep so meek and mild.

Shshsh tiptoe to the cradle now

Take a present to celebrate His Birth

Members sing softly "Peace on Earth"

And sing a lullaby to say "Goodnight"

Silently leave that Holy Sight.



Nadolig Llawen a Blwyddyn Newydd dda
Shirley and Ann

My brush with The Ripper police by Gareth Williams



The death of Peter Sutcliffe, The Yorkshire Ripper, brought back memories of my years working for The Daily Mail in Manchester – and how I was momentarily dragged into the inquiry.

I was a sports sub-editor in the newspaper's Deansgate office – my dream job at the time: four nine-hour shifts crafting stories and writing headlines, then reporting on Northern football on Saturdays, often at Wrexham since The Racecourse ground was just an hour away from my home in Cheshire.

My journey home from work, which could be anytime between midnight and 2am, took me through Moss Side, the red-light district of Manchester, which had become of huge interest to the inquiry after two of Sutcliffe's victims were found nearby. One night I was pulled in at a police checkpoint and questioned quite intensely. At first, I didn't let on that I was a journalist, hoping they might let something slip in the form of a new lead on the case. But when they said that my car had been clocked on many occasions and accused me of being a regular visitor to Moss Side, I had to tell them where I worked and why I was driving through each night. They wanted some form of proof and, luckily, I had a copy of the following day's Daily Mail on the passenger seat – fresh from the press. Their attitude soon changed and we chatted about the case, although I never got the scoop I was hoping for! My sports editor was not so lucky. He came from Sunderland and had a very strong Wearside accent, very similar to the voice on the hoax tapes sent to the police by "Jack the Ripper". He was taken in and questioned for some hours before being released.

I was in the office the day Sutcliffe was arrested in January 1981. A massive cheer came up from the crime desk and the editor sent for drinks and food for everyone. It was a real party atmosphere and a great outcome for reporters who had spent years on the case. I was sorry to leave Manchester where I had learned so much from seasoned journalists, but Fleet Street beckoned and we eventually moved to Essex where we found so many new friends – and of course the **Chelmsford Welsh Society**.



Traditional Christmases in Wales- Gwil Williams (*Traddodiadau Nadolig yng Nghymru*)



From carol singing to opening presents on December 25th, there are plenty of Christmas traditions that are part of the festivities in the UK. In Wales we have a list of unique traditions; some familiar and some very strange!

Plygain

In many parts of Wales, Christmas meant rising early, or even staying up overnight, to attend the *Plygain* service at the local church or chapel. The starting hour appears to have varied between 3 a.m. and 6 a.m., the latter becoming more common of late. According to Mrs. Thrale's journal of a tour in 1774 the inhabitants of my home area, Dyffryn Clwyd in north east Wales, kindled their lights at two in the morning and sang and danced to the harp until the *Plygain* started. In other districts, especially country towns, the time was spent playing in the streets. In Tenby, Pembrokeshire, for example, crowds carried torches, shouted verses and blew cow-horns, before finally forming a torch procession in which the young men of the town escorted the rector from his house to the church. A similar procession is recorded in Laugharne, Carmarthenshire, and also in Llanfyllin, Montgomeryshire, where candles were used instead of torches.

During the service the church was decorated inside with chandeliers holding coloured candles and, in Dolgellau, for example, decked with holly. In Maentwrog, Merioneth, candles were also fixed in sockets on the tops of standards or posts fastened to pews in various parts of the building. In Llanfyllin the edifice was lighted with some hundreds of candles, placed a few inches apart from each other, around the walls inside, which made the building look very brilliant. In Maentwrog it was the carollers singing in the little gallery at the bell tower end of the church who brought their own candles, for it was too dark in that part of the building to follow the service in the Common Prayer Book.

The unique form of carol-singing, a Welsh Christmas song, characterised by close harmony and originally sung by small groups of men, is still very much a living tradition, and has indeed seen somewhat of a revival over the last 30 years. New singers and groups have emerged, and services have been established in various parts of the country, where the older carols can be heard alongside new original carols composed in the traditional mode.

One of our favourite groups at the Welsh Society – 'Sorela' sing many 'Plygain' songs, which, in the true tradition of the event, they sing unaccompanied. Their mother, Linda Griffiths, who formed the group 'Plethyn', specialises in this form of singing as well.



'Sorela' (Brian Farmer's favourite group!) performing for us in 2018.

Noson Gyflaith (Toffee Evening)

This was a traditional part of Christmas or New Year festivities in some areas of Wales, especially in the North, earlier this century. Families, in their turn, would invite friends to their homes for supper, usually in the form of a Christmas dinner, then playing games, making toffee, and storytelling.

When the required ingredients had boiled to a certain degree, the toffee was poured onto a well-greased slate or stone slab. The hearth-stone itself was used for this purpose in some houses. Members of the happy gathering would then cover their hands with butter and attempt to 'pull' the toffee while it was quite warm.

Mari Lwyd

The Mari Lwyd is almost certainly a pre-Christian ceremony, and was once widespread in Wales. In the south west of Wales, it was called '*Y Gynfas Farch*' (The Canvas Horse). It could make an appearance at different times of the year varying with the county or place. In Pembrokeshire it was associated with New Year, but visits from the creature would take place over *several days or even weeks!* Making the Mari Lwyd was a rather gruesome task, as it usually comprised the skull of a horse that had been stripped of flesh by burying with lime. Sometimes a wooden block was used; the lower jaws fixed with a spring so that it would shut with a snap and frighten the onlookers! The skull or block was fixed to a pole approximately 5 feet long with a white sheet draped over the head and attached like a cloak. There were bells and coloured ribbons sewn to the skull, glass eyes and cloth ears. A man would then stand under the sheet operating the mouth. The Mari Lwyd would be part of a group of men dressed sometimes as the leader and main singer, the *Sergeant*, the *Merryman* and *Punch and Judy*. This procession would approach a house and having knocked and being denied entry, would commence singing traditional rhymes. This would be a light-hearted battle of nerve and wits between the party outside and the householders within. Eventually the entourage and the Mari Lwyd would gain admittance, the horse snapping and biting at all the women! There was then much fun and frolicking, with Punch chasing Judy, kissing the women, Judy sweeping the hearth and Merryman playing the fiddle. Eventually all would sit down to eat and drink and be merry!



A Mari Lwyd Costume

Calennig

The giving of gifts on New Year's Day is an ancient custom. In Wales it took the form of collecting *calennig* (New Year's Gift). Children would form groups and go from house to house, bearing good wishes for the health and prosperity of the family during the year to come. This was symbolised by the skewered apples, stuck with corn and sprigs of evergreen, which they carried in their hands. Verses were sung at the door of the house, and they would receive small gifts of food or money for their troubles. Latterly, the carrying of the apple has been discontinued, and only the recitation of a few verses and the collecting of new pennies mark the custom in those districts where it has survived.

Here is a verse sung in Cardiganshire and Pembrokeshire:

*Mi godais heddiw ma's o'm tŷ
A'm cwd a'm pastwn gyda mi,
A dyma'm neges ar eich traws,
Sef llanw'm cwd â bara a chaws.
(I left my house today
With my bag and my stick,
And here is my message to you,
Fill my bag with bread and cheese.)*

Hunting the Wren

'Hunting the Wren' in Wales usually took place between the 6th of January and the 12th which was Twelfth Night. The Wren-Hunt had a long tradition in Britain, especially in Ireland and Wales, though the custom was also practiced in other parts of the British Isles, including Scotland and the Isle of Man, as well as England. Customs change over the centuries but basically it involved a party of young men who would go out and catch a wren — the smallest of all the birds. Sometimes it would be killed but sometimes it would be put alive in a little cage which they called his 'elor' or bier. Dead or alive they would carry it in procession through the neighbourhood singing songs praising the wren as the King of the Birds. They always called at the 'big house' during their procession for there they would be invited in and have food and wassail and sometimes money.

This custom was evident in north Wales in the nineteenth century where the visitors would sing verses with alternate questions and responses. The first verse asks a question and the second verse responds, usually with a description, often humorous, of the wren-hunt and its outcome:

"Where are you going?" "Going to the woods"
"What will you do there?" "We'll hunt the wren"
"Where will you find him?" "Under a bush"
"How will you get him home?" "With horse and cart"
"How will you cook him?" "In a big pan"

Holly Beating or Holming

The day after Christmas Day was celebrated in a way unique to Wales and included the tradition of "holly-beating" or "holming." Young men and boys would beat the unprotected arms of young females with holly branches until they bled. In some areas it was the legs that were beaten. In others, it was the custom for the last person to get out of bed in the morning to be beaten with sprigs of holly. These customs died out before the end of the 19th century (luckily for those like me who like a lie-in!).

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