

EMIGRATION FROM BLAENAU GWENT

The 19th century was a period of inward migration and of emigration. Hundreds of people left the Welsh countryside to seek work and a better life, they hoped, in the valleys of Glamorgan and Gwent, but when depression hit the ironworks and the coal mines, many decided to go in search of pastures new in foreign lands. Most chose to go to North America, but in 1865 a small group of Welsh people turned their attention towards South America, and in particular to Patagonia where they intended establishing a Welsh homeland. What follows is a brief look at some of these pioneers who went from the Blaenau Gwent area.

JAMES BERRY RHYS

James Berry Rhys was born in Rhymney about 1842, but the Rev. Abraham Matthews states that it was from Festiniog that Rhys travelled to Liverpool to join the *Mimosa*. He was a 23 year old bachelor, but on 3 July 1868 James Berry Rhys married Grace Roberts from Bethesda, Caernarfonshire, at Glan Camwy, the ceremony being conducted by the Rev. Abraham Matthews. Their first home was named Dolantur, and they later moved to the homestead that they named Rhysfod. Their children were Tudfyl (1869 -72), Myfyr (1871) Rhun (1873), Ellen (1877), Llewelyn (1879), Tydfyl (1875) and Gwilym (1880). James Berry Rhys was President of the council in the Colony and his signature is to be seen on many of the letters issued by the administrative committee. When the schooner *Lucerne* arrived in 1875 he went to greet his old friend Thomas Pugh, and since they were both builders and masons, together they built a number of the houses along the valley. James Berry Rhys had built the first school, which also doubled as a chapel, at Glyn Du near Rawson between 1873 and 1874. Lewis Jones composed an elegy upon the death of James Berry Rhys, 'Vy Ngarnad am Berry Rhys. 22 Medi, 1883' (LIGC 12202A).

Another passenger on the *Mimosa* was

JAMES DAVIES (IAGO DAFYDD/ IAGO MAWRFRYN)

Abraham Matthews lists him as being from Brynaman, but judging from one of his pseudonyms, as Elvey MacDonald has shown, it is more likely that the eighteen year old youth was from Brynmawr. Not everyone in Wales was in favour of the emigration to Patagonia and letters decrying the venture were published in the Welsh press. To counteract this, some of the letters written home by the emigrants to friends and family were published, and James Davies's letter dated 8 November 1865 to his friend H. Evans (Tobit) of Hirwaun was among those published in *Llythyrau a ddaethant o'r Sefydlwyr*. After stating that he was 'healthy, very healthy' he added 'You most probably want a report on the country that we spoke so much about in the Brynmawr area years ago' before going on to give a brief description of the area under the headings 'The Chupat valley', 'The gifts' and 'The Company'.

In spite of his rude health, James Davies died in February 1868; he got lost on the pampas during a journey from Port Madryn to the Valley, and his horse returned home without him. His remains were never discovered.

The next family have made great contributions to the cultural, social and educational life of the Wladfa

THE FAMILY OF DAVID STEPHEN JONES

David Jones was born in Ceredigion in 1850, the second son of Stephen Jones, a native of the Llangeitho area, and Sarah his wife. When David was about ten years old the family moved to Rhymney where Stephen became an Iron miner and David a collier. Sarah died in 1870 and a request was sent to Ceredigion for a member of the family to come to Rhymney to look after the home. The relative who came was Mary Jones, baptized at Llangeitho Parish Church on 29 December 1850, a daughter of Benjamin Jones, Gwynfil Hall, Llangeitho, and his first wife Marianne Rowland, who was a direct descendant of the Rev. Daniel Rowland, Llangeitho. Here I should mention Mary's brother, David Benjamin Jones, who was born in Llangeitho on 9 August 1844 but who left his native village for Merthyr Tydfil and thence to Tredegar, before settling in Rhymney and marrying Mary Ann Jones. The first of the ten children of David Benjamin Jones and Mary Ann was Thomas, the renowned Thomas Jones CH, Deputy Secretary to the Cabinet of Prime Ministers Lloyd George, Bonar Law, Stanley Baldwin and Ramsay MacDonald, university lecturer, civil servant, administrator, author and founder of Coleg Harlech and *Welsh Outlook*.

David Stephen Jones had an accident in the pit and decided that he no longer wished to continue as a miner. David and Mary Jones were married in Bedwellty Register Office on 29 March 1875 and shortly afterwards left for Patagonia. David Stephen's two sisters, Margaret and Mary later followed their brother to Patagonia, married and raised their families there. At first David and Mary lived on the farm belonging to David Jones, Maes Comet, before moving up the valley from Rawson and choosing a farm which they named Rhymni. Later, they moved to another farm which they named Twyn Carno after that part of Rhymney where the family had lived in Rhymney.

David Stephen Jones, Twyn Carno, was a prominent figure in the life of the Wladfa, especially among the farmers of the valley. He was chosen to be one of three members of a commission appointed to visit South Africa when there was talk among some colonists of emigrating there. His services were again called upon when a representative of the Valley was needed to visit Australia in order to gain a market for the Colony's alfalfa seed. He worked hard and doggedly for some fifty years to help and promote every movement of note in the Wladfa. It was on Rhymni's land, in a tent, that many of Trelew's eisteddfodau were held in the 1930s.

David S. and Mary had four children but Cyllyn, Meillionen and Benjamin died in infancy. However, the eldest child, Aeron, lived a long and fruitful life as a farmer in the Wladfa. David Stephen died in 1935 aged 85 and Mary on 5 August 1939 aged 88.

Aeron Jones married Ellen, the daughter of David and Rachel Jones, Maes Comet.

THE FAMILY OF DAVID JONES, MAES COMET

This David Jones, too, was a native of Ceredigion, and information on this family is to be found in Elvey MacDonald's autobiography, *Llwch*. Briefly, David was born on 10 July 1852 at Blaen Tir, Llangoedmore, a son of David Jones, a tailor, and Eleanor née Evans. The family later moved to Blaenporth before relocating to Llwydcoed, Aberdare. Following the death of David Jones senior in 1859 at the early age of 33, his widow married widower Thomas Davies, and shortly afterwards Eleanor, Thomas Davies and their children from both marriages emigrated to Patagonia on the *Mimosa*. At first, David lived with his mother and stepfather in the Drofa Dulog area before obtaining his own farm which he named Maes Comet (Comet's Field) after his pure bred stallion of that name.

David married Rachel, the eldest daughter of Rhys Williams and Elizabeth Morgan, and they had ten children.

RHYS WILLIAMS AND ELIZABETH MORGAN, CEFN GWYN

Rhys is said to have been from Nant-y-glo and Elizabeth from Brynmawr, but the obituary of their granddaughter Ellen Jones claims that both Rhys and Elizabeth were originally from New Quay, Ceredigion. Be that as it may, they were married shortly before leaving Nant-y-glo in 1851 with a group led by Thomas Benbow Phillips to establish a Welsh colony in Brazil. They lived in Rio Grande do Sul, but when the venture failed they decided to travel down to the Colony on the banks of the Chupat. They failed at first to get any further than Patagones and began to settle in the vicinity of Rio Negro, but eventually succeeded in reaching the Wladfa and settled on a homestead that later became known as Cefn Gwyn. In an article on the beginning of the Methodist cause in Bryn Gwyn, Mrs Evan Roberts, Parc y Llyn, named Rhys Williams and his wife as among the faithful members from the very beginning of the cause. Mrs Williams was renowned for her piety and worked tirelessly to establish a chapel in Trelew, Rhys didn't attend services regularly because he was very deaf 'but he was a true Christian'.

THE FAMILY OF AERON AND ELLEN JONES

Four children were born to Aeron and Ellen – Clydwyn ap Aeron Jones, Meillionen, Meilir Gwyn and Dewi Mefin – but Meilir Gwyn died aged two. Meillionen was born on 10 November 1910, she married William Edward Davies and raised two daughters, Elen Meriel and Vilda Norma, before dying on 15 November 2007 aged 97. Robin Gwyndaf composed a memorial poem to Meillionen which appeared in the summer 2008 issue of *Y Drafod*.

Clydwyn ap Aeron Jones, born 17 June 1913, has been described as one of the Colony's most brilliant sons, a prominent musician, one of the Wladfa's dearest and one of its giants'. He spent his life in the world of music and was composing to the last. He was conductor of the Chubut United choir and was always willing to give a helping hand to the region's choirs. Together with his brother Dewi Mefin and Elvey MacDonald he was one of the instigators of the campaign to re-establish the Gorsedd in the Wladfa, and he became its Honorary President. Clydwyn died on 12 January 2008 aged 95 and Iris Lloyd de Spannaus won first prize in the *Mimosa Eisteddfod* of 2008 for her memorial poem to Clydwyn, 'el Maestro de Musica'. In her tribute to Clydwyn, which appeared in the Winter 2008 issue of *Y Drafod*, Edith MacDonald

calls him 'a faithful custodian of everything pertaining to Welsh culture'. He composed arrangements of hymns and hymn tunes and of musical compositions from Argentina, Spain and Mexico. He won a scholarship in 1950 to study music in Trinity College, London, and it was during that period that he became a Member of the Gorsedd of bards. He was an adjudicator at the National Eisteddfod of 1967; the author of a book on the history of the harp; and was the chaired bard at the Trevelin Eisteddfod for his poem 'Ffydd, Gobaith, Cariad' ('Faith, Hope, Charity').

The youngest of Aeron and Ellen's children, Dewi Mefin, spent his career in education. He was headmaster of the William Morris School in Dolavon, taught Geography at Coleg Camwy and was later a lecturer at Trelew University. In his role as Deputy President of the Gorsedd he conducted ceremonies at the Maen Llog and on the Eisteddfod stage alongside his brother Clydwyn ap Aeron Jones. Dewi Mefin represented Wales and the World at the National Eisteddfod in St David's in 2002. He is married to Eileen James, and their two children, Martin and Sandra, were raised in a Welsh speaking home.

This brings us to a further connection with Blaenau Gwent since Lizzie Elen, the mother of Eileen James de Jones and her sister Vali Jones d'Irianni, was the daughter of Elizabeth Evans from Tredegar and her second husband, Owen Roberts.

THE FAMILY OF THOMAS AND ELIZABETH EVANS, TREDEGAR

Thomas and Elizabeth Evans went to Patagonia in 1881. Elizabeth was the daughter of Sarah Thomas and Charles Lewis, and in 1871 Charles, Sarah and their children, Morgan, Elizabeth, Sophia, Christina, Mair and David, lived in 17 River Row, Tredegar. Elizabeth's husband Thomas was the son of Thomas Evans, Coal Haulier and a native of Tredegar, and his wife Hannah was from Llangrannog, Ceredigion, according to the census returns. When they emigrated, Thomas and Elizabeth had three children – Thomas, who emigrated to Canada when he was twenty years old, Charles, a bachelor who looked after the farm in Patagonia, and Sophia, who married and raised a family in the colony. When her husband died, Elizabeth married Owen Roberts, originally from Treborth near Bangor, a widower and father of two sons, Harri and Mymbyr. Elizabeth and Owen had four children – the eldest, Annie Grace, born 1 June 1897, was a very well-respected teacher who became the second wife of Headmaster Edward Thomas Edmunds. Their son Geraint ap Iorwerth Edmunds, a civil engineer by profession and winner of the Bardic Chair at the 1993, 1999 and 2005 Eisteddfodau held at Trelew, is the present President of the Gorsedd of Bards in the Wladfa. On the 1911 census, Annie Grace Roberts, 'Visitor, 13, born Chubut, Argentina', was with her grandmother Sarah Evans and unmarried aunt Annie, a Schoolmistress, at Windsor Villa, Tredegar.

Owen and Elizabeth's other children were Margaret; Christianna who married Gordon Roberts; and Lizzie Ellen who married Richard Morgan James.

THE FAMILY OF ENOCH DAVIES

Among the passengers of the Vesta in 1886 was Enoch Davies and his family from Tredegar – his wife Catherine and children Jane, 12, William Enoch, 11, Morgan Rees, 7, Solomon, 5, and Mary Eliza, under one year old. On the 1871 census Enoch, a Coal Haulier born in Tredegar, Catherine born in Llanbadarn, Ceredigion, and son

Evan were living in 'Back of 17 Jenkins Row', and by the time of the 1881 census were at 145 Vale Terrace, Tredegar. The eldest son, Evan, remained in Wales and settled in the Bridgend area. William Enoch married Jane, daughter of Dafydd Hughes and Catherine Davies, and were the parents of David, Owen, Margaret, Elizabeth and Mary. Catherine Davies died on 27 May 1914 aged 66 and Enoch on 3 December 1915. William Enoch died in 1949 at the home of his daughter and son in law, Jane and Henry Leopold Hayes, in Comodoro Rivadavia.

THOMAS AND ANN PUGH, MORIAH

Thomas Pugh was from Rhymney, the son of Thomas Pugh, a stonemason, originally from Cilcennin, Ceredigion, and Elizabeth his wife from Lampeter. According to the 1861 census, their eldest son Thomas was also born in Lampeter but their other children were all born in Rhymney. Like his father, Thomas was a stone mason aged 16 in 1861, and he could well be the Thomas Pugh who married Ann Richards, also from Rhymney, in the Bedwellty Registration District in the December quarter of 1866. Thomas and Ann were among the second party of Welsh people who emigrated to Patagonia from North America in the schooner Lucerne in 1875. Although five children were born to Thomas and Ann in North America, four of them had died there. A son, Arthur, was born on the voyage south and a further four children in Patagonia. In his obituary in *Y Drafod* Thomas is described as a well-known character throughout the settlement because of his occupation as builder and mason; he built many houses in the Valley with his friend James Berry Rhys. He was faithful, honest and kind, a good neighbour. He loved talking about Rhymney and its people and was delighted at meeting anyone who could give him news of his old friends there. He was a faithful and industrious member of Moriah chapel for some 25 years but for the last 6 years of his life was a member of Tabernacl Chapel, Trelew. Ann died 3 June 1921 and Thomas on 9 September 1922.

THE GUILFORD FAMILY

John Guilford was born in the Maesteg area but his wife Margaret Thomas was born in Rhymney in 1849 the daughter of Thomas Thomas, 'Refiner of Iron', born in Llandeilo, and Mary Eynon who was originally from Trelidiart in Pembrokeshire. Margaret and John were married in 1875 and emigrated to Patagonia in 1881, settling at first in the Gaiman area before moving in 1887 to the Tir Halen area. They had ten children. They lost their first home to floods but built the second near the ruins of the first. Margaret is described in her obituary as an optimist, always looking on the bright side, happy and cheerful but with a strong and determined will, striving for perfection in everything she undertook. She served her area as a midwife when no doctor was available and although she had not received much in the way of formal education, she was very fond of reading. She belonged to the Baptists, but would join in the worship of other denominations and was a member of the nondenominational chapel in Tir Halen. She died on 9 June 1925.

THE COSLETT THOMAS FAMILY

Most of the Coslett Thomases hailed from Carmarthenshire but the connection with Blaenau Gwent and the Wladfa comes through David Coslett Thomas and his wife Eleanor Thomas. Their son William was born in Twyn Carno, Rhymney, in 1861, John in Rhymney in 1863, Mary Ann in 1865 in Tredegar and Evan, Catherine and Elizabeth in the Rhondda. The family emigrated in 1875 on the schooner *Thames*, and Sara Jane and Joseph were born in Chubut. In his autobiography, John Coslett Thomas recounts the tale of a visit made by the Rev. D. S. Davies to Ebenezer Chapel, Tonypany, to give a talk on Patagonia, at the end of which David Coslett Thomas invited him home to supper. That night, David and Eleanor decided that they would emigrate to Patagonia, and Eleanor's sister and her husband would go with them. Before going, they bought milking vessels, sickles, a scythe, a plough, harrow, harness for a team of horses and a small hand mill for grinding corn, carpentry and building tools and a stock of clothes. In Patagonia they had a farm in Tair Helygen near Rawson and later moved to Trelew where they kept a small guest house. Their daughter Mary Ann married Hugh Samuel Pugh, raised 13 children, and kept the first tea house in Gaiman and later the first hotel. There's a story about President Roca, during his visit to the territory in 1899, being taken to the hotel for lunch, and Roca and his numerous guests feasting on 10 plum puddings. William, Evan Sara and Catherine remained in the Wladfa; John eventually went to Canada and died in Los Angeles; Elizabeth and Joseph emigrated to Australia. William Coslett Thomas went up to the Andes around 1884 and was of tremendous help in developing the area. Eleanor died in February 1918 and David Coslett Thomas in 1923 aged 87.

D. T. EVANS

It is said that David T. Evans who died on 15 November 1926 aged 65 was a native of Tredegar. He is credited with always being willing to make himself as useful as he could.

THE PRICE FAMILY

Although this family lived in Bedlinog, Glamorgan, before some of them emigrated to Patagonia, the mother, Jane, was a sister to Mary Jones the wife of David Stephen Jones and David Benjamin Jones. Her husband, Thomas Price, was a direct descendant of the Welsh martyr John Penry. It is believed that William emigrated to Patagonia around 1904, and the name of a William Price is listed as a passenger on the *Orellana*, 20 October 1904. Mary A. Price was born in Bedlinog in 1882. She was obviously a very clever girl since she was a scholarship to attend Pontllynn Intermediate School and then passed the King's Scholarship. Soon afterwards she became a pupil teacher at Bedlinog Intermediate School. She had set her heart on going to university but her health broke and doctors advised her to leave Wales for a healthy and more temperate climate. Her aunt and uncle, David Stephen and Mary Jones, invited her to join them in Patagonia, and she is said to have emigrated there in 1902. She worked tirelessly for the Irrigation Company for many years and played a prominent part in the work of the Cultural Society. She took an interest in the life of the Wladfa in general, in its religious, literary, commercial and educational life. She died at Twyn Carno on 3 December 1929 aged 47. Her brother William married

Louisa Maud, daughter of Robert Taylor, Trimley; William died on 12 September 1915 and Louisa Maud in December 1921 aged 37, leaving four orphaned children

Eirionedd Baskerville

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