



Newsletter 7 – January 2012

Happy New Year
2012
Blwyddyn Newydd Dda

Welcome to our seventh Newsletter. We invite you to contribute articles, tips, questions and answers for others to share. Feedback is always welcome.

January Meeting Review

Subject: "Using Census Records", with John Ball and Hilary Williams.

This illustrated talk was conducted in two parts. John gave us the history, development and implementation of censuses. He spoke of the detailed instructions given to the enumerators and the laborious task they had of collecting the Household Schedules and of writing all the details from the Schedules into the Census Enumerators' Books (CEBs). With the exception of the 1911 census, it is only the information from the CEBs that is available to researchers. Hilary, using her own experiences, spoke of the pitfalls of using the censuses and how to get around these. She illustrated how the censuses on *Ancestry.co.uk* can be manipulated to find that elusive family member.

This talk, together with the accompanying slides, will be available on the Society website in due course.

As a member, you are invited to make an appointment with one of the Society's Committee if you would like individual help in using Ancestry or Find my Past at the Library in Brecon.

FindMyPast.co.uk has recently made available the previously redacted information about the infirmities of individuals on the 1911 Census. Thanks to member Helen Whyte for this information. *FindMyPast* is available at many libraries and archive offices.

The New Society Website

December was not a quiet month for Jennie Williams and John Ball. They worked long hours in setting up the new website at www.blfhs.co.uk. It was launched at our monthly meeting on the 4th January. The benefits of the new website include the easy-to-remember web address and the once only need to sign in as member. On behalf of us all, I want to thank Jennie and John for their hard work since our foundation last June as well as the fantastic work which they have completed over Christmas to get this website up and running. The website is an essential part of our Society because it brings the Society to the Members, no matter where they live.

Websites

There are details of the bicentenary anniversary of the Monmouth and Brecon Canal on the Canal Festival website at www.facebook.com/MonmouthshireAndBreconCanal. Our Society will be getting involved with the anniversary activities. We will let you know more, later.

Traditional Christmas and New Year celebrations (Y Gwyliau)

Over the Christmas and New Year period, I thought about the traditions which many of us still follow, but which have their origins deep in pre-Christian, pre-reformation and Welsh culture:

- **Greenery** – over the Christmas period, my grandmother and my mother always wanted holly stuck behind the pictures on the wall. If it had red berries then all the better!
- **Mistletoe** – a friend told me that a piece of Mistletoe had to be kept from one Christmas to the next.
- **Carol singing** - around the houses and farms during the lead up to Christmas. Members of the Young Farmers Clubs still do the rounds of the local houses and farms singing carols and collecting for charity.

- **The Plygain** - (derived from the Latin for cock crow). Originally, the Plygain service on Christmas morning had worshippers attending the early morning service between 3am and 6am. I remember, however, certainly until the 1970s, that not quite so early (about 8am) Plygain services were held in the Abercrave Group of Churches (including Coelbren and Callwen). Here is a traditional Plygain carol:

Ar gyfer heddiw'r bore, 'n Faban bach, 'n Faban bach;
For the sake of this very morning as a little baby, a little baby
 Y ganwyd gwreiddyn Jesse, 'n Faban bach;
Was born the root of Jesse, as a little baby;
 Y Cadarn daeth o Bosra, Y Deddfwr gynt ar Seina;
The Strong one who came from Bosra, The Lawmaker of old on Sinai,
 Yr iawn gaed ar Galfaria, 'n Faban bach, 'n Faban bach;
The Redemption to be had on Calvary, as a little baby, a little Baby,
 Yn sugno bron Mareia, 'n Faban bach.
Suckling the breast of Mary, as a little Baby.

Caed bywiol ddwfr Eseciel, ar lin Mair, ar lin Mair;
The life-giving water of Ezekiel is found, on Mary's knee, on Mary's knee,
 A gwir Feseia Daniel, ar lin Mair.
And the true Messiah of Daniel, on Mary's knee;
 Caed bachgen doedd Eseia, 'r aweddid roed i Adda;
Here is the wise boychild of Isaiah, the promise made to Adam,
 Yr Alfa a'r Omega, ar lin Mair, ar lin Mair;
The Alpha and Omega, on Mary's knee, on Mary's knee;
 Mewn côr yn Methlem Jiwda, ar lin Mair
In the stall in Beth'lem of Judah, on Mary's knee.

Diosgodd Crist o'i goron, o'i wirfodd, o'i wirfodd,
Christ took off his crown, of his free-will, of his free-will,
 Er mwyn coroni Seion, o'i wirfodd;
In order to crown Zion, of his free-will;
 I blygu'i ben dihalog, o dan y goron ddreiniog
To bow his undefiled head, under the thorny crown
 I ddioddef dirmyg llidiog, o'i wirfodd, o'i wirfodd,
To suffer enraged derision, of his free-will, of his free-will,
 Er codi pen yr euog, o'i wirfodd.
To raise the head of the guilty, of his free-will.

Am hyn, bechadur brysiau, fel yr wyt, fel yr wyt;
For this, sinner, hurry, as thou art, as thou art,
 I 'mofyn am y noddfa, fel yr wyt.
To ask for his Sanctuary, as thou art;
 I ti'r agorwyd ffynnon, a ylch dy glwyfau duon;
For thee the well was opened, which washes thy black wounds
 Fel eira gwyn yn Salmon, fel yr wyt, fel yr wyt;
Like the white snow on Salmon, as thou art, as thou art,
 Gan gynny tyrd yn brydlon, fel yr wyt.
For that, come promptly, as thou art.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9RIJPgY0gCg&feature=related>

This version on YouTube captures the essence of the Welsh musical tradition of unaccompanied singing.

- **Calennig** (New Year's Gift) – letting in the New Year by visiting rural houses and farms for cash or gifts and singing, for example,

Blwyddyn Newydd dda i chi
A happy new year to you
 Ac i bawb sydd yn y tŷ
And to everyone in the house
 Dyma fy nymuniad i
This is my wish
 Blwyddyn Newydd dda i chi
A happy new year to you

See YouTube version from the Abercrave, Breconshire at:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hhlzkJBGGOI>

- **Mari Lwyd** (Grey Mare of Grey Mary) - probably a pre-Christian with pre-reformation (Cult of Mary) influences. This was mainly a South and West Wales tradition, but was revived in Breconshire in the Upper Swansea Valley in the early 1970s (my mother and I became part of the Mari Lwyd Group there). This was another New Year custom, involving a group of people one of whom carried a veiled horse's skull (real or mock-up) on a pole. The jaws of the skull were made to open and close in a ghostly fashion. As the party visited farms or rural houses and public houses, the leading member of the party sang a series of Welsh verses which were answered, also in verse, by someone within the property. Traditionally, this was a battle of wits and ability at extempore rhyming. Eventually the party gained entrance and entertained the inhabitants with a series of traditional songs or hymns. In return the party received refreshments and, in modern times, money for charity.

Mari Lwyd carol

Wel dyma ni'n dwad
Here we come
 Gyfeillion diniwad
Dear friends
 I ofyn am gennod i ganu
To ask permissions to sing

 Os na chawn ni gennad
If we don't have permission,
 Rhowch wybod ar ganiad
Let us know in song
 Pa fodd mae'r 'madawiad, nos heno
How we should go away tonight

 'Does genni ddim cinio
I have no dinner
 Nac arian iw gwario
Or money to spend
 I wneud i chwi roeso, nos heno
To give you welcome tonight

The traditional song can be heard in Welsh, and followed from a written English translation, on the National Museum of Wales website: <http://www.museumwales.ac.uk/en/1555/?id=2>
 Different verses were often sung in different regions.

The YouTube links below show Mari Lwyd being performed in Abercrave, Breconshire:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZZu8lCuEUMY&feature=related>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?NR=1&feature=endscreen&v=wUrwAgAlUMc>

Further information is available at:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/wales/christmas/sites/content/pages/archive.shtml>

<http://www.museumwales.ac.uk/en/faq/christmas/>

Trefor M Owen, *Welsh Folk Customs* 1959 National Museum of Wales Welsh Folk Museum; ISBN 10 0863833470

Iorwerth C. Peate, *Tradition and Folk Life* 1972 Faber and Faber; ISBN 0 571 09804 5

Mary Corbett Harris, *Crafts, Customs and Legends of Wales* 1980 David and Charles; ISBN 0 7153 7820 1

J. Geraint Jenkins, *Life and tradition in Rural Wales* 1976 J. M. Dent and Sons; ISBN 0 460 04197 5

Do you have any traditional or special family memories of Christmas and New Year to share with us? Do send them in to me.

NEXT MEETING

Date and time: Wednesday, 1st February 2012 at 2:00 pm.

Venue: Brecon Library, Ship Street, Brecon

Subject: "Houses in Brecon", with Mervyn Jenkins of B Jenkins and Sons Ltd

BLFHS WEBSITE

Our new website address: www.blfhs.co.uk

CONTACT DETAILS

If you wish to respond to or comment on an item in this newsletter, or contribute to the next newsletter or to our website, please contact our Chairperson:

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