



COMMUNITY COUNCIL NEWS

A small committee has been set up to move progress on phase two of the Memorial Hall renovation plan. The Hall, as most of you will be aware, has served the community well over the past half century but is now in need of substantial renovation. Phase one of the work saw the successful installation of a new roof and toilets. Phase two will involve work on the fabric of the building as well as making alterations to the rear of the building. The committee is currently engaged with our architect, Mr. Dewi Evans, in seeking a way forward that will be affordable, and will meet the needs of current users. It is hoped to install as many energy saving devices as possible in the building during phase two to ensure that its running costs are kept to a minimum. Disabled access and toilet facilities are also proposed for the rear of the building making it totally independent of the main hall.

Rather than continue with the event as a competition, the council intends re-introducing the Dyffryn Clydach in Bloom awards as recognition of the effort put in by residents to produce eye-catching displays to the front of their properties that can be enjoyed by everybody, from within and without the community. Certificates will be presented to those residents who, in the eyes of the judges, have produced outstanding displays. The



Outgoing Chairman Councillor Lyn Thomas hands over the chain of office to this year's Chairman Councillor Gwyn Edwards

only rule given to the judges to follow is that the displays are to be judged, "as seen from the highway".

Look out for information from the Police who will shortly be setting up an "out-station" in the Memorial Hall. Every week our regular police constable will be available to meet residents. So, don't bear a grievance, but do call in to see the people who can make a difference.

This year's Dyffryn Clydach Fun Day will be held on Saturday 16 July in Longford. There will be

fun activities for the children as well as charity stalls. Presentations will be made to green fingered gardeners in the area and to round off the day there will be bingo to follow. Last year's event was very successful, so come along and enjoy the day.

After several years deliberation the Local Government Boundary Commission for Wales has been directed to conduct a review of the boundary between Blaenhonddan and Dyffryn Clydach. This particularly affects Taillywd Road and the Brookfield Estate.

Anyone with an interest is invited to send comments by 14th July to: **The Secretary, Local Government Boundary Commisison for Wales, Caradog House, 1-6 St Andrew's Place, Cardiff CF10 3BE.**

For further details contact your local Councillor.

Neath Abbey Improvement

This aerial photograph shows the extent of the work undertaken to improve the sewage system in the Neath Abbey area.



Photograph courtesy of Morrison Construction Services Ltd.

A MONKEY PUZZLE

Everyone is missing the monkey puzzle tree from the corner of Monastery Road, and with it has gone some of the character of the area. There are several mature monkey puzzle trees still remaining here, which is quite unusual because they were only newly introduced to this country just over a hundred years ago and would have been found only in the gardens of the rich landowning gentry. They were much loved by the Victorians and an avenue of them was planted at the Dyffryn Estate. Apparently, one bundle of young trees fell from the cart on the journey from Neath Railway Station to Dyffryn, and shortly afterwards several of them were to be found springing up in unsuitable town gardens in the area. Old photographs show them in Longford Road, Rockfield, The Croft and Monastery Road. One still survives in New Road next to the Hope and Anchor, and there are others to be found in Skewen.

The monkey puzzle tree is an evergreen tree of ancient evolutionary origin. It grows naturally in the high Patagonian mountains of South America. Based on pollen studies, it would appear that even before the Ice Age it was once a native of the British Isles. This is a very ancient tree, and on the basis of fossil records, it is estimated to be about 60 million years old. It is the nearest living example of trees of the Carboniferous period, 300 million years ago, which gave us coal.

When the tree is 30 to 40 years old, large cones are produced which may hold up to 200 seeds about 3 to 4 cms long. The seeds are edible, and in its native land are a staple food of the Indians, being sold in the local Chilean markets. It is also useful as an animal feed, and for its timber. Archibald Menzies (1754 - 1842) was a great explorer and plant collector and took part in journeys around Cape Horn and the North Pacific. Whilst dining in Chile one night, he was unable to identify some nuts on the table and put some in his pockets to study later. Some of them

sprouted whilst still on the voyage and so these baby trees became part of the rare plant collections in Britain.

About 1850 the species was still very rare in gardens, and not widely known. The proud owner of a young specimen at Pencarrow garden in Cornwall was showing it to a group of friends, and one made the remark "It would puzzle a monkey to climb that." As the species had no existing popular name, first "monkey-puzzler", then "monkey-puzzle" stuck. (In fact, there are no monkeys to be found in its native Chile!) Although not a pine tree, it is also known as Chile Pine or by its botanical name *Araucaria araucana*.



A mature monkey puzzle tree in Neath Abbey.
Did this fall from the back of a cart many years ago?

AGE CONCERN is a charity dedicated to helping the more senior members of our community. It has a small core of full-time administration staff but depends very much on trained voluntary workers who give up their time to help their fellow citizens. The organization has access to a large store of information and advice. It operates to high professional standards. Any help or advice given is strictly confidential.

If you are aged 60 plus, **Age Concern** can help you with claiming your full benefits entitlement. By contacting the Hotline 01792 325284 you can obtain free independent and confidential advice on benefits checks, help with making claims, help with forms, information and advice. There are also home visits to people who would otherwise experience difficulties in visiting the offices at Neath and Neath Abbey. **Age Concern** can also help with insurance queries.

Help and information is available to the over 50's

on Benefits/Money, Community Care, Housing, Leisure and Education, General, Complaints about poor service, Resolving disputes. A confidential one to one service is offered to residents of Neath Port Talbot which is intended to help people retain their independence and to make informed choices for themselves.

Contact Helpline: 08700 602 141. Lines are open 0900 - 1630 Monday to Friday.

If you are 50 plus there is an opportunity to learn new skills involving the use of computers and the internet. Free computer lessons are held at 1st Stop Shop, Holly Street, Pontardawe, by appointment. Contact Bob on 08700 602 141. The sessions are supervised and no previous computer skills or experience is necessary.

Please remember that **Age Concern** is a charity. Donations are gratefully received, enabling free services to be offered to the elderly of this area.

CONGRATULATIONS

Zoe Jones and Stephen Absalom have both been honoured by receiving awards at the Dylan Thomas Centre, Swansea in a ceremony marking the 10th anniversary of the High Sheriff of West Glamorgan Awards. The prizes are given to people who have made an outstanding effort and contribution in their



local community. Stephen Absalom is well known for his work here, particularly with the Dyffryn Clydach Volunteers. Zoe Jones, who is working on her Duke of Edinburgh's Award, regularly helps with bingo sessions and children's disco's and was nominated for her voluntary work in the community. She was the youngest person to receive the award this year.

GRŴP AMGYLCHEDDOL DYFFRYN CLYDACH ENVIRONMENTAL GROUP



The group has been very busy, working hard on several varied projects.

As part of the habitat management of Coed Bach recent work has included rhododendron clearance and the control of sycamore saplings and laurel - all non-native species which are so invasive. This will let more light into the woodland, allowing other native woodland plants better conditions in which to grow. The woods are rich in botanical interest and many of the species are at their best in May. Bluebells, celandine, wood anemone, violets, yellow archangel and marsh marigolds are all to be found at this time of year. It is planned to undertake a full survey of the plants growing within the woods.

A cold but happy morning was spent helping the children of Neath Abbey Infants' School Early Years Unit in planting daffodil bulbs and a selection of young trees.

The trees planted to replace those damaged by grass strimming in Longford Road, Graig Parc and Cwrt Herbert are all thriving well.

Part of the group's environmental work has been in supporting the Keep Wales Tidy campaign, by taking part in several litter picks in the area. During past months these have taken place in Cwrt Herbert, Coed y Graig, Tesco's, The Drive, Old Road and Neath Abbey Industrial Estate. There have been joint operations involving both Dfyr y Felin Lower School and Mynachlog Nedd Junior School. Eco Council members from the junior school join the regular group meetings and have a positive input. It is planned to have further joint activities involving the schools.

It would be good if people would make full use of the council's roadside recycling scheme for the collection of newspaper, glass and garden waste. The countryside is there for all to enjoy as well as protect.

Why not join the Environmental Group and help with their work in Dyffryn Clydach? Full details of meetings can be obtained from Chairman Terry Griffiths 01639 637964 or Secretary Hugh Thomas 01792 321537.



A skip full of rubbish was gathered in just a couple of hours

**THE FRIENDS
OF NEATH
ABBEY IRON
COMPANY** hope eventually to regenerate the site in Neath Abbey. They meet monthly. For further information contact Robert King, 01639 711480.



KEEP WALES TIDY

MYNACHLOG NEDD JUNIOR SCHOOL has been working hard to gain the Eco-Schools Award.

The pupils, represented by School Council members Megan Perris and Jack Anderson, attend monthly meetings of the Dyffryn Clydach Environmental Group.

Helped by Amanda Fleming, letters were sent to Tesco's manager, Mr Bob Savage, to complain about the rubbish and litter around the store at Neath Abbey. This resulted in a clean up and a further exchange of letters thanking Tesco for their efforts.

Now the school is involved in the Keep Wales Tidy

promotion and Class 4J has been out of school with the Dyffryn Clydach Environmental Group to litter pick around Neath Abbey. The school also had a litter pick around the playground and playing field and has been designing posters and slogans to remind the pupils not to leave litter.

Further schemes involve planting trees and shrubs to enhance the environment.

We wish Mynachlog Nedd success in achieving this nationally recognised award and look forward to seeing the school flying the coveted European Green Flag in due course.

Dfif Y Felin Lower School children organised a clearance of litter in The Drive. 30 bags were filled in a short time, making a dramatic difference to the appearance of the area. They say, "Many hands make light work." Thank you Dfif y Felin.



NEATH ABBEY INFANTS' SCHOOL EARLY YEARS UNIT children planting spring bulbs.



TRACTOR HELPS OUT

The sight of a grey tractor is becoming quite familiar in the area. It is a vintage 1946 Massey Ferguson which is currently being restored by the Dyffryn Clydach Volunteers. It is being put to good use because they use it almost every weekend in their environmental work, mainly to clear rubbish. It is also used to deliver bulky orders for Longford Gardening club.



Neath Port Talbot Ramblers

The Neath Port Talbot Ramblers continues to flourish with present membership standing at over eighty.

A varied programme of Sunday walks ensures that members see our wonderful countryside at all times of the year with walks in the Brecon Beacons, Gower and the Vale of Glamorgan.

In March the walk to Pen y Fan, the highest mountain in South Wales, was particularly enjoyable, walking in deep snow under a brilliant sunny sky.

The summer programme commenced with a bus trip to the Wildfowl Centre at Slimbridge in Gloucestershire and over thirty members enjoyed a dry and generally sunny day watching large numbers of different species of birds.

Further walks are planned for the end of May to celebrate open access to the countryside as well as walks in Pembrokeshire National Park.

A weekend away in September will see the group travel to Dolgellau for walks on Cadair Idris.

For details of walks and Rambler membership contact secretary **David Davies on 01656 733021.**

NEWS FROM COUNCILLOR MARTYN PETERS

Member Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council

As part of an on-going works programme of resurfacing throughout the Dyffryn ward work has been completed in Rhyd Hir. This follows on from resurfacing the roads in The Croft, Hill Road and The Highlands. By creating parking for residents in The Drive, it is hoped to alleviate the major problems caused with the increased traffic accessing Dfyr y Felin Lower School.

A new pelican crossing will be installed on New Road by Neath Abbey Infants' School and work is being carried out to pavements in the area. Wider pathways are being made on Longford Road near the railway bridge, and it is noticeable that grass verges are being cut back in Longford, allowing a wider pathway and making the place generally more attractive.

This is just part of the general tidying up work carried out throughout the ward. The next target



areas will be The Highlands and Cwrt Herbert.

There are still problems with fly tipping and general litter. People are urged to make use of the kerbside collections for glass, newspaper and magazines and garden waste. For **FREE** disposal of bulky household items such as furniture, refrigerators, etc, just telephone 01639 764555 to arrange collection. The old civic amenity site at Briton Ferry has now relocated to Briton Ferry Industrial

Estate. This deals with household waste and recycling and can be accessed from the roundabout on the A48 in Briton Ferry. It is open every day except Christmas Day.

For any problems or issues Councillor Peters holds a surgery in Longford Memorial Hall from 10.00 to 11.00 every first Saturday of the month except August. At any other time he may be contacted on 01792 813174.

Some thoughts from...

DYFFRYN CLYDACH NEIGHBOURHOOD WATCH

This is the time of year when the mowers start humming and the strimmers start buzzing! Make sure that your garden equipment is locked away securely, to ensure that it is still there the next time you need to use it. A good quality lock, properly installed and USED, is an essential part of any garden shed.

When in your garden, make sure that the house is not left vulnerable to "would-be" thieves; windows and doors that are out of sight should be shut and secured.

If you see anything suspicious, such as a stranger walking slowly by and taking an interest in neighbours' properties, do not hesitate to 'phone

"999" and report it.

Finally, be aware of "odd job" men. This is the season for hedge trimmers, gutter cleaners and roof repairers to become active. Beware of bogus tradesmen – they are the ones who "just happen to be passing when they notice a loose slate." NEVER pay until the job is completed to your satisfaction.

Helped with finance from the Community Safety Team of Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council, our "newsletter" is currently being distributed. Why not join the group and help to hand them out? Meetings are held on the second Monday of each month in the Longford Memorial Hall at 7.00pm and last about an hour.

Further copies of **Ymlaen** will be available in Neath Abbey Post Office, price 30p.

The editorial team of **Ymlaen** is prepared to consider publishing items from individuals or organisations within the community. Please contact any Councillor for more information.

Editor: **Mrs Margaret Smith,**
49 Hill Road
Neath Abbey
Neath
SA10 7NP

RECIPE ♦ RECIPE ♦ RECIPE

FRESH CITRUS FRUIT DRINK

Forget about expensive squash with all its added ingredients. Make 1½ pints of concentrate using fresh ingredients. (For a deliciously refreshing drink vary the recipe using grapefruit.)

Juice and finely grated rind of 1 orange and 1 lemon
¾lb sugar; ½oz citric acid; 1 pint boiling water

Mix all ingredients thoroughly. Leave overnight to stand until cold. Strain.

Store in refrigerator and dilute to taste.

DYFFRYN CLYDACH COMMUNITY AWARD

At last December's carol concert, the Community Council introduced an award to be given to residents of Dyffryn Clydach in recognition of their contribution to society, whether in Dyffryn Clydach itself or in the community at large.

In its inaugural year, three individuals were considered to be worthy of the award having between them given a total of over ninety years service to society as members of the Women's Royal Voluntary Service. As members of the WRVS Mrs. Ann Davidson, Mrs. Phyllis Griffiths and Mrs. Irene Tossell have



Mrs. Ann Davidson, Mrs. Phyllis Griffiths and Mrs. Irene Tossell receive their certificates from Councillor Lyn Thomas, Chair of Dyffryn Clydach Community Council

unselfishly given of their time to help in the shop at our local hospital, and have also provided a facility at the Friends' Meeting House in Neath to prepare

meals for the less well-off in our midst. In addition to the above, the ladies of the WRVS have also played important roles in providing support for the emergency services during occurrences such as the fire at Hale's factory a few years ago when residents living within close proximity to the scene were removed to the Memorial Hall for safety. The ladies catered for their needs with military efficiency.

NEATH ABBEY WOMEN'S INSTITUTE

This year Women's Institutes are celebrating the 90th anniversary of the founding of the organisation in the UK. The first meeting was held in Llanfair PG and in Glamorgan alone there are 96 Institutes with approximately 3,500 members. Neath Abbey marked the occasion at the Crymlyn Group Meeting where events depicting the year 1915 were portrayed.

Catering for the Women of Today, of all ages, members enjoy various activities such as walking for charities, skittle matches, and outings, and a Birthday Lunch was held recently at the Smiths Arms, Neath Abbey.

Meetings are held at the Dunstan Memorial Hall on the last Thursday of each month at 7.00pm and visitors would be made most welcome.

Contact 01792 812428 for further information.

Longford Parent & Toddler Group

9.15 - 11.15 Wednesday & Friday mornings

Longford Memorial Hall

- ★ Toys
- ★ Refreshments
- ★ Arts and crafts
- ★ Seasonal parties

Everybody welcome

AREE GARY A BANK HEEL

Diddorol oedd darllen colofn Hywel Widlake yn Clecs y Cwm am esboniad Mr Roy Clement, Yr Highlands, ynglŷn ag ystyr un o'r manau mwyaf poblogaidd yn nhirlun Dyffryn Clydach sef yr "Aree Gary", fel y'i leferir yn y Saesneg. Yn ôl Roy, daw tarddiad yr enw o'r hen draddodiad o gerdded i fyny at y Graig i garu. Digon rhwydd, wrth ynganu'r ymadrodd "Graig i garu" yw gweld sut daeth yn "Aree Gary".

Esboniad diddorol arall gan Roy, a hollol gredadwy wed'i glywed, yw ystyr yr enw a roddir i'r man lle mae'r gamlas yn gwasgu dros dyfrbont ger y mynachlog – y man lle mae'r afon Clydach yn llifo oddi tani i'w haber yn yr afon Nedd, sef y "Bank Heel". Man, a chanddi ochrau llyfn a syth, lle bu cenedlaethu o fechgyn yn plwyf yn ymdrochi ynddi. Felly, daeth "y man cul" yn "Bank Heel".

Longford Mothercraft Club

Congratulations to longstanding members Mrs Ann Davidson, Mrs Phyllis Griffiths and Mrs Irene Tossell on the presentation of the Dyffryn Clydach Community Award in recognition of their valuable voluntary work in the community.

Members of Longford Mothercraft Club would like to thank everyone who supported them during 2004, enabling them to raise £1,500 for local charities.

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|------------------------|------|
| • Cancer Carers | £100 |
| • Alzheimers Society | £200 |
| • T ^a Hafan | £200 |
| • Y Rhosyn | £500 |
| • Wales Air Ambulance | £500 |

Get Gardening

Margaret Smith

By now the growing season should be well under way. Colourful flower gardens and decorative flower beds should be flourishing and vegetable gardens will soon be productive.

However, weeds can become a problem as they compete for moisture and nutrients. Weeding by hand can be really time consuming, and back breaking as well. I find the best control is by regular hoeing. Hoeing during dry weather will ensure that the weeds dry up and die, done in wet weather they are liable to re-root. Whether you use a draw hoe or a Dutch hoe, just be careful you do not slice the tops off your prized plants!

Here are a few seasonal reminders for June and July.

LAWN CARE

A well maintained lawn with trimmed edges will show your house and garden to best advantage. Avoid too close mowing, as this may result in shallow rooted weaker grass and weed and moss growth.

VEGETABLES

There should be lots to harvest soon in the vegetable garden - peas, broad beans, spinach,

carrots, potatoes, salad crops. Continue with successional sowings of lettuce and radish and French and runner beans. Plant out leeks and brassicas ready for next winter.

FLOWERS

Remember to stake taller perennials to prevent them from being damaged in the wind. Keep summer bedding moist during dry weather and feed plants in containers and baskets. To prolong the flowering period, deadhead the flower border regularly. Collect seed from seedheads when they are ripe and about to be dispersed. Seed should be collected on a dry day, and be left to dry for a few days before storing. I keep mine in well labelled sealed envelopes.

For gardening supplies remember to visit Longford Gardening Club. The shop is to be found in the garage compound off Heol Penlan and is open on Sundays between 10.30am and 12.30pm. For supplies at other times ring 01792 814850.

To Don Morgan, a stalwart member of Longford Gardening Club, best wishes for a full recovery after a recent illness.

Nature notes

If asked, "What is the most common bird in the U.K.?" most of us would probably say it was the house sparrow. Unfortunately, we would be way off the mark, for the house sparrow has recently been placed on the Red List – the list of birds that are, or are becoming endangered. The number of house sparrows has declined by over 50% during the past 25 years.

The first disaster to hit the house sparrow was back in the 1920's when the introduction of the internal combustion engine brought an end to our dependence on the horse. The subsequent closing of stables in almost every street in our towns and cities ended a constant supply of ready food in the form of spilled grain. Over the years numbers recovered, and in the early 1970's there were 25 million house sparrows living in Britain. Thirty years later, this figure has halved. In London, for example, seven out of every ten sparrows vanished between 1994 and 2000. Neither is the problem confined to built up areas, for the decline has also occurred in the countryside and in semi-rural districts.

A number of theories have been put forward for this decline in the house sparrow population.



House Sparrow

Intensive agricultural practices, especially in the arable sector, have substantially reduced the availability of cereal grains, weed seeds and small insects. In urban areas, the supply of aphids, vital for nestlings during their first days from hatching, has virtually dried up as more and more "waste land" or "brown field sites" are taken for development. Because they live in or close to domestic properties, cat predation accounts for a significant number of losses, with more house sparrows than any other species of bird being killed by cats. The lack of suitable nesting sites due to modern building techniques and

materials, and the spread of disease caused by dirty feeders and bird tables are also among the many possible causes suggested as reasons for its rapid disappearance.

In Dyffryn Clydach, as in Wales in general, there has not been a decline in the house sparrow population as yet, but it is as well that we are aware of the bird's plight in other areas and do all that we can to safeguard its existence here.

(Source: *Breeding Birds in the Wider Countryside: their conservation status 2004*. BTO Research Report No.385)

D. J. THOMAS

OVER 50 YEARS ON THE BUSES

Since 1954 when Doug Thomas started his own coach company, the local firm has moved on a long way.

The company now employs twenty full and part-time staff to man their growing fleet of vehicles. The business has



One of the early coaches

expanded to include not only a taxi service and airport travel, but also private hire, school contracts and holiday travel.

The business started with a taxi service and the firm's taxi still carries the number 001 – the first hackney carriage registered by Neath Borough Council many years ago. Then in 1954 Doug Thomas purchased his first coach. In the early days his wife Barbara helped by cleaning and

scrubbing the inside while Doug would clean the outside. As a qualified mechanic, he undertook the maintenance of the coaches as well as the driving.

In the 1950's and 60's seaside trips were really popular outings and Porthcawl and Barry Island were regular destinations.

As the business grew the firm bought other vehicles to cope with the demand for their services, and with three coaches they moved from the Highlands to Cwm Clydach Cottages where there was more room to expand. For the last twenty five years they have been operating from their own purpose built yard at Milland Road, Neath where the fleet of vehicles is based. The busy office is here as well as the garage.

Fifty years on, and the firm of D. J. Thomas Coaches is still very much a friendly local family-run business.



Doug Thomas



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