

*Blaengarw  
Workingmen's  
Club*

“The first Fifty Years”

By Arthur Davies 1971

Edited and Revised by  
Gwyn Evans

*During the compilation of this short history of the Blaengarw Workingmen's club and Institute, I received the able assistance of two founder members – Tom Evans, herein after known as Twm Red, and George, or Georgie Morris. As there are no records extant prior to 1937, the product of their joint memoirs proved to be invaluable*

*Arthur Davies – 1971*

## The First Fifty Years

On the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month in 1918, armistice was declared. The war to end all wars was over. Europe was at peace. Those fortunate enough to return from the trenches came home to full employment and reasonably good wages. There was prosperity - but not for long.

In January of 1919, the Blaengarw Workingmen's Club and Institute was registered and opened with, according to Twm Red, some 60 or so members, many of them ex servicemen but recently back from the blood soaked fields of Flanders and the Somme.

The club was contained in a converted dwelling house on the corner of Blaengarw Road, in Blaengarw, a small mining village at the top end of the Garw Valley. On the ground floor there was a bar room some sixteen feet by twelve, with a room of similar dimension overhead. The upstairs room, used mainly on weekends for sing songs and meetings and the like, was a place where members could play table skittles and bagatelle. Downstairs, opposite the bar counter, where beer was served straight from the wood, was a large open fireplace. In one corner, a doorway led to an outside toilet, in another was a stairway to the upper floor. Furniture was functional rather than comfortable - eight scrubbed top tables, ordinary kitchen type chairs, several home made wooden benches, on an upturned barrel a quoits board and on the floor, several heavy black iron spittoons, strategically placed. Chewing tobacco was a habit much indulged in by local mineworkers at that time, consequently there was a lot of spitting.

Notwithstanding the lack of space, Twm Red explained enthusiastically "But we had some great fun and happy times there, and the members then were the happiest bunch of boys I can remember" incidentally, Twm joined the club in February, 1921 when he was demobbed from the army, and he went on to serve as a committee man for 21 years unbroken service, a record of which to be truly proud.

The Club in its early days was leased from Thomas Williams of the Llanharan Hotel in Pontycymmer, for a rent of Ten Shillings per week. Included among its original members were such as Twm "Red" himself, Fred Walters, Jack Challenger, Jack Phillips "Pembroke", Enoch Rees, Dan Davies, William Lacey, Ernie Mapstone, Con Bridgeman, Dai Hughes "Cwmparc", Dai Hughes "Crier", Will Griffiths, Harry "Bach" and Georgie Morris.

A common practice in the mining valleys of South Wales was the use of nicknames. With so many Jones, Evans, Davies and the like, many with identical Christian names some ready form of identification was a must, hence we had Dai "Cwmparc", Dai "Crier", Dai "Farm", Dai "Cinema", and Dai "Glenys" - all Dai Hughes. The same applied to Davies and the other common surnames. Some of these nicknames were much more explicit, even humorous - Billy "Blackberry Pie", Dai "Bad Back", Fred "Fish fingers" and Dai "Big Dog".

In addition to the Club itself, the adjoining house was also rented for the Stewards quarters. When I questioned Twm and Georgie concerning the duration of tenure of the Clubs early Stewards and Officers, they were unable to help, some forty odd years having elapsed, and at 68 and 73 years of age respectively, memory is a fallible thing, but the information they each offered differed so little that we can accept with some certainty the things they did say.

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At the time the Club's chief supplier was Thomas Morgan and Sons from Pontyclun Brewery. Thomas Morgan played an important part in the development of the club.

Another to whom the Club owes much is Georgie Morris, who joined in 1920, and went on to serve as Chairman for twenty-five years. Now we all know that the successful Club Chairman should be tolerant and tactful, and the soul of discretion and integrity. Georgie Morris is all of these things, and he was, and still is, held in the highest esteem by all our members. I will always remember his Edwardian style of dress, namely his bell bottomed trousers, and the way he rolled his cigarettes and his skill at the game of "tip-it".

The first steward was one Siencyn Evans, and the first Secretary Tom Williams "Potts". The identity of the first chairman is in some doubt. Twm Red seems to think it might have been one of the following – Fred Williams, Jack Phillips and Dai "Cwmparc". In 1921, Morris Morris succeeded Siencyn Evans as steward. The length of time early officers and stewards served is uncertain, it is certain, however, that the club was admitted to membership of the Club and Institute Union, the CIU, on the twenty second of March 1921, the year "Depression" reared its ugly head. With it came the South Wales Miner's strike, the miner's leader at the time being Frank Hodges. Broken – after thirteen weeks, the miner returned to work for lower wages. Frank Hodges deserted them to join the Coal owners. Nevertheless, when I queried older members on what kind of a man he was, they all claimed him as a good leader – such is loyalty.

Many of the local strikers were fortunate in obtaining employment laying what we now know as the "New road", running from Shad William's house at Pandy down to Brynmenyn. Earlier the horse drawn brakes and wagonettes which preceded the petrol driven omnibuses ran up and along a rough road over the lower slopes of Llangeinor mountain, also from Pandy, to emerge at Abergarw farm near the now closed Abergarw Brewery. Some time between 1919 and 1920, the Garw had its first bus and charabanc. A man from Pontycymmer, Richard Griffiths, known as Dick the "Devil" running an open top charabanc to Porthcawl and other local resorts on club outings and the like. Whenever it rained – up would go the umbrellas. The first bus – the Garw Queen, was run by a Jones of Blaengarw (Now Jones's Buses Bryncethin) who operated a service from Blaengarw to Pontycymmer, and even to Bridgend.

In the early 1920's electricity came to the valley, but several years were to elapse before most houses enjoyed its benefits.

Back to the club, however, in 1922 the steward was a man named Arthur Gough, whose son Bert, then a schoolboy, is now one of our members. He well remembers living in the steward's quarters adjoining the club. The secretary was Jim Chilcote. During the year the valley experienced its biggest ever fire when the Hippodrome (known locally as the "Rink"), in Pontycymmer, a large wood and corrugated iron building used for concerts, boxing and wrestling tournaments, variety shows and roller skating, hence the name the "Rink", was completely gutted, the flames visible for miles around.

The first steward to come from outside the valley was Jack Ackerman, from Maesteg, who took over in 1923. Georgie Morris thinks he was there for two or three years.

For the sport minded, the same year saw the first Wembley Cup Final, between Bolton Wanderers and West Ham, and the opening of the Great Exhibition, also at Wembley. Unemployed miners, of whom there were many, began the excavation of the Blaengarw Recreation Ground, hewn from the mountainside with pick and shovel

and sweat. Unemployment was rife and workers wages, everywhere, were continually eroded. Being one of a family of six, three brothers and three sisters, I will remember having dripping or margarine, marge as we knew it, in place of butter, and I can recall, not without bitterness, my mother crying because she could not provide us with the things she would have liked. Even though my father worked regularly, without ever receiving a penny pocket money we were still poor. We were living in a colliery owned house at Pwllcarn Terrace, and after rent and other stoppages had been deducted from his wages, he was lucky to take home thirty shillings each week. Those who lived or rather existed, on unemployment benefit, the "dole" as it was known, were less fortunate – a single man receiving seventeen shillings a week and a married couple twenty-nine shillings, with two shillings extra for each child. Although house coal was only ten shillings a ton, we could ill afford to buy it, and heating costs were supplemented by coal picked from the colliery spoil tips. From the age of twelve I kept the home fires burning in this way, and when I left school at fourteen to work in the local colliery, my two younger brothers carried on. Without wishing to dwell upon the matter, my experiences were not uncommon in those bad and desperate days of deprivation.

In the early twenties, the founding fathers of the club had struggled hard to amass a small amount of capital, namely £300. Still struggling in 1924, they borrowed £800 from Thomas Morgan of Pontyclun in order to purchase the club and the adjoining stewards quarters from Thomas Williams of the Llanharan Hotel for the sum of £1100. Morgan charged them five per cent interest, but after one year he reduced this to two and a half per cent. Six months later, he waived the payment of interest, a gesture much appreciated by the club members. Georgie Morris informed me with some pride, "Arthur, we repaid the loan within three years". No mean feat, particularly when money was so hard to come by. An achievement of which to be justly proud.

In 1925, Georgie Morris was elected chairman, with Dai Hughes "Crier" as secretary and Will Griffiths as Treasurer. For many years they managed the clubs fortunes through the ups and downs of times good and bad, up to, during, and in the years immediately following the Second World War.

I am not quite sure when Jack Ackerman terminated his duties as steward, but by 1926 Jack Harris from Merthyr Tydfil had taken over. He was a lean, gaunt, one-eyed man whom I can but vaguely remember. According both to Georgie and Twm Red, he was a strict disciplinarian, possessed of more than average intelligence and his advice was often sought on all manner of subjects, such as income tax, property management and buying, and common law. It was said the he owned considerable property in Merthyr. In direct contrast to Jack, his wife was short, plump and extremely jolly, and the members held her with much affection.

Georgie Morris gave Jack Harris a parrot which he kept in a cage hanging in the bar room. As you will later learn, the parrot had the distinction of making the newspaper headlines. That was in 1926, the year I began working at the International colliery, seven hours a day for fourteen shillings a week after stoppages. On May the first of the same year; the miners of Great Britain came out on strike. Their leader was the communist A J Arthur Cook. I well remember going down to Heol-y-Cyw to hear him speak, on the common, with an eloquence and sincerity, which had to be heard to be believed. He fired me with enthusiasm and a bitterness and hatred toward the coal owners and the capitalist society, which remain even now, although not perhaps with the fury of my youth. Arthur or AJ Cook as he was better known, approached the Trade Union Congress and succeeded in getting the support of

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every union in the land, and the General Strike began, when the whole of Britain was brought to a standstill. This was the only occasion when this has happened. It lasted however for only ten days, leaving the miners isolated, left to fight alone. They stayed out for eight months after which – defeated and broken – they returned to work a longer eight-hour day for lower wages. Many of those prominent during the strike found themselves victimised by the owners, and unemployment was rife. Thousands left the valleys for the greener pastures in England, most never to return, save for the occasional holiday.

During the period of the strike, to help while away the idle hours, the club organised sporting tournaments and road races. The course for the road races ran from the club down to the Black Bridge, around Bridgend road and back, and on occasion down to the Fox and Hounds in Brynmenyn and back. I remember William "Boyo" Rees winning a marathon and Arthur Wilcox, better known as Arthur "Bach" a walking race.

While the strike lasted, each member was granted ninety-eight checks(or tokens), each redeemable for one pint of beer, considering the circumstances a truly magnanimous gesture. According to Georgie Morris, at the time membership of the club was limited to ninety-nine. A restriction imposed by lack of space and the fact that once it reached the magic one hundred, the Union, CIU, would require an extra guinea per annum in fees.

In those days the stone flagged floors were swept and scrubbed every day, and sprinkled with fresh sawdust (obtained from the colliery sawmill). Each table had its mandatory spittoon. As I have earlier mentioned, spitting was prevalent – a filthy, disgusting and most unhygienic habit now, thankfully, disappearing. Games that were played included Bagatelle, Table skittles, Quoits and Dominos – old game and "fives and threes", card games such as Nine card Don, Cribbage and All Fours and the ever-popular Tip-it. Beer drawn from the wood, then and for many years later was sixpence (two and half new pence) a pint, although Thomas Morgan did introduce a beer selling at fourpence. The Secretary was paid ten shillings and sixpence( just over fifty new pence) a week, the treasurer five pounds per annum and the chairman nothing at all. For the first fifteen years of Georgie Morris's term of office the steward received two pounds and ten shillings per week.

A feature of the strike period were the "Soup Kitchens" situated in the local chapel vestries, the church hall and the Lesser hall, financed by small donations and from the proceeds of the threepenny and sixpenny charity concerts, dances and boxing tournaments organised by the strike committees. They provided unemployed men and boys with a much needed and valued breakfast and dinner at no cost, each diner taking along his own cup, plate and cutlery. Coal for heating the stoves was picked from the local colliery tips, and the cleaning, preparation and cooking of the vegetables etc, was undertaken by the men themselves, each having been given a number and allocated a specific task by the various "kitchen" committees. But for the "Soup Kitchens" there would have been many empty bellies. There was also a boot repairing depot operating in the old skittle alley at Nanthir Road. I am telling you these things in the hope that they will help those too young to know, to understand the debt they owe to the sacrifice of those miners of the past.

The following year, 1927, saw the big landslide at the International, or Carn Colliery, when the top tip, loosened following prolonged and heavy rain slipped, burying the office and a garage wherein was the car belonging to the manager's son. The clerks working there were warned just in time to save their lives. The landslide seriously affected production at the colliery, when threatened with closure, we

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experienced what was known as "Stop Trucks", working but two or three shifts per week, but the other local collieries were likewise affected. Despite the difficult times, the club still managed to keep its doors open.

1927 saw the F.A. cup leave England for the first and only time when Cardiff City defeated Arsenal 1-0 at Wembley Stadium.

From then on, the club enjoyed some stability regarding the tenure of the steward and officials, and steadily, it slowly progressed toward financial viability.

In passing, it might be of interest to record some of the more enjoyable aspects of club life at this time. On the first Monday of each month Mr Davies, the representative of Thomas Morgan's brewery called to collect the cheque in payment for the previous months beers. Whilst he was there, he donated two cheques, each worth sixpence to every member present, for those who drank the fourpenny beer, this meant three pints, a tremendous fillip. His visits were eagerly anticipated, and members would congregate at various vantage points throughout the village awaiting the arrival of his car. As soon as it was spotted, they would immediately converge upon the club to await his generous offer, oftimes the bar would be choc-a-bloc, with members even sitting upon the stairs. Davies, a bluff, hearty man was well aware of what was happening, and I believe he secretly enjoyed it all, for he was bringing a little light relief into an otherwise very drab existence. As I have already mentioned, he was a friendly man with a genuine fondness for the club, and business concluded, he would depart with a firm handshake here and there, a wave of the hand, and the words "well cheerio boys, see you all next month". Occasionally, throughout the month, there would be complaints regarding the quality of the beer. Whenever he was made aware of this, but after distributing his largesse, he would stride to the middle of the floor "well boys", he would say "the committee tell me there have been complaints concerning the gravity of the beer, what's the matter with it?". And he would be answered with a chorus of "the beers all right Davies", or some such conciliatory remark. As soon as he was gone, however, the disgruntled would begin again. "His beer is bloody awful", would be their moan, while the faithful, equally determined, would defend its merits to the hilt.

Every August Monday, Davies would invite the members to visit the Brewery at Cowbridge where they were provided with all they could eat and drink – roast beef, boiled ham, pickles and beetroot – all they could wish for, and gratis. This function was held in field behind the brewery. Some members, eyes bigger than their bellies guzzled all day long. Then at Christmas, he would give the club four barrels of beer. This meant twenty pints for each member, again free. This practice he kept up for many years, and it was obvious to all that he made an outstanding contribution to the well being of the club. He was, by the way, the landlord of the Dunraven Hotel in Bridgend as well as being a brewery representative. Georgie Morris always spoke of him with affection and respect, maintaining that he would do any and everything he could to help.

I think that the most revolutionary event of 1928 was the screening of the first talking picture in the Pontycymmer Hall – "The Singing Fool" starring Al Jolson, some, however, say the first talkie was "The Broadway Melody", but I'm fairly certain it was the former. I can also remember Ivor Price staging boxing tournaments in the upstairs room of the Nanthir Hotel. I took my chance there when I fought Stan Greenslade of Pontycymmer. For four rounds, I received five shillings and two black eyes, don't laugh, I did win. Top of the bill that night was a lightweight contest between Billy Pritchard and Tommy Farr. Subsequently, the same Farr went on to win the British heavyweight title and to narrowly lose to the legendary Joe Louis, the

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Brown Bomber, in a world championship bout, when the verdict could have gone either way.

Ivor Price, the promoter of those early shows is an example of the ambitious underdog, with perseverance and business acumen, winning through against all odds to become a successful and prosperous businessman. Starting with a lump sum payment he received for an injury sustained in the colliery, he became a street corner bookmaker accepting threepenny bets, and went on after a long struggle to become a registered bookmaker with an office in Bridgend. Nowadays, he can be seen driving an expensive car, a man of considerable wealth, at least by our standards.

Throughout 1929 and into 1930's, dole, depression and the ugliness that poverty brings was still with us. The majority of the local people owed money to the shopkeepers, many of whom were driven out of business, forced to close down. In the strand, where once the shops would have been brightly lit, with shelves full of goods, they now stood empty – a grim reminder of the sad state the whole country was in. The lucky ones still working were repaying the debts they had occurred during the 26 strike by deduction from their weekly pay docket. The Means Test was introduced and those who had scrimped and saved whilst they were working were made to live on what little savings they had, using them all up before they could receive any help from the Board of Guardians, or the dole.

All over the land workers or rather unemployed workers, thousands upon thousands of them organised "Hunger Marches", when hundreds joined processions to march to London to protest to the then Tory Government. From Scotland they marched, from Yorkshire, and Jarrow and South Wales, after many days and nights on the road, to all converge in Hyde Park. There were continual strikes in the coalfield over non-unionism, and I can well recall a large contingent of policemen escorting two of these non-unionists, or scabs as they were called, from the Ocean Garw colliery to their homes. At one time, there were as many as a hundred or so policemen drafted into the valley and it was inevitable that skirmishes and unfriendly incidents took place between police and local strikers, to be followed by the inevitable retribution – fifty to hundred summonses for riotous behaviour or assault. A bitterness towards the police resulted, healed only by the progress of time.

1935 also saw the first "stay in strike", in the valley, at Ocean Garw, when many of the men stayed underground for several days and nights as a protest against the employment of non-union or "scab" union labour. The ordeal was such that some of those who took part suffered from impaired health as a result, dying before their time. Once again, during the duration of the strike, unfriendly incidents occurred – the smashing of the windows of the "scab" workers, and the tarring of their front doors.

Small acts of violence also took place, with one striker sentenced to nine months imprisonment. At the time I was on crutches, having broken a bone in my ankle playing football in Brynna. Around midnight on the night the strikers were expected to come to the surface, with a large presence of police in evidence – to maintain order – I went down, on my crutches, to see what was going on, and in the melee which ensued, I was tumbled, quite deliberately, off my crutches by one of the policemen. I saw another policeman give old Fred Walters a right good dig in the ribs. Summonses followed. I was really surprised to receive one myself for riotous behaviour and assault, some, who were not even present also received them. At the time Alf Davies, who later went on to become the president of the South Wales Miners Federation, was the lodge secretary at the Ocean colliery. Incidentally, we won the strike when the coal owners agreed to recognise only our union.

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Throughout those desolate years, the club struggled on, under the chairmanship of Georgie Morris, who maintained that for all the miserable poverty, the club provided a welcome haven of friendliness and comradeship for its members.

Sometime in 1936, the steward – Jack Harris let us all down, deserting his wife to run away with a local woman. Not long afterwards he came to a tragic end, committing suicide by gassing himself. The same year, I joined the club, and from then on I can write with some authority. Mrs Harris, Jack's wife carried on as stewardess.

On Saturday, the 30<sup>th</sup> of January in 1937, the club was raided by the police, and taken to court, the case coming before the Bench at Bridgend on April the 7<sup>th</sup>. The following writing from the South Wales Echo, supplied by Will Jones, States:-

### “Parrot swore at Police” “Blaengarw Club Raid Incident”

“A parrot, which was alleged to have been kept in the bar of the Blaengarw Workingmen's Club was stated to have sympathised with the members of the club when the police raided the premises, and to have sworn at the Police. Following the raid, application was made to the Bridgend Magistrates today for the club to be struck off the Register on the grounds that it was not conducive in good faith, that there was frequent drunkenness on the premises, and that persons who were not members were habitually admitted

W.M. Thomas solicitor, of Bridgend prosecuted for the police and Mr Forbes, barrister of London, instructed by L.J. Davies and Son of Pontyclun, defended.

After detailing the various objects of the club, Mr Thomas stated that the management committee of the club appeared designed for one object only – the sale of beer. On the day of the raid there were alleged to be only 61 men on the premises, but none of them, according to the subscriptions book had paid their subscriptions for that quarter. The raid was carried out by Inspector David Richards of Ogmere Vale and 8 or 9 police officers who were posted at various points in the club. When Inspector Richards walked towards some the men in the bar, they became offensive.

Mr Thomas added that a parrot kept hung up in the bar seemed well trained in the atmosphere of the club. It did not conceal its disgust at the police for raiding the club, but expressed its sympathy openly with the members – for every time the police passed the cage, the parrot said “B\*\*\*\*\* you”.

Mr Thomas stated that the secretary Mr David Hughes was called for, and he appeared to be very much under the influence of drink, when the warrant was read out to him, he asked, “who is this Inspector Richards? Where is he” After the Inspector told him, he said, “well lets have a pint before we start then”.

Mr Thomas said that the police took possession of the club books, which showed that the total bar takings for the year 1936 were £2,659.9.2p there were 53 gallons of beer on the premises at the time of the raid – and the books showed that the average consumption per member for the past 6 months was 17 pints per member per week, but that did not include the amount consumed by casual visitors.

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Mr Thomas said that there were no newspapers on the premises, but there were 370 books, all covered with dust, and with the exception of one book called "The Maid of Cefn ydfa", there were no other books being read at the time".

Unfortunately there are no cuttings or records available about the clubs defence. Georgie Morris confirms that the barrister we engaged was a good one, who put forward the following points in our favour – there had been no prosecutions against any of the club's members for drunkenness for years past, the club's library register showed that 30 to 40 books were issued weekly, the club's quarterly bill for newspapers daily, not including periodicals, and the number of 61 members alleged not to have paid their subscriptions was grossly overstated. The police application failed, but the club was placed under their supervision for twelve months, and every Saturday night for the ensuing year they paid the premises their weekly visit.

During the course of the case, Mrs Harris left and the newly appointed steward was Eli Davies, of Queen St. That was in May 1937. Incidentally, Georgie asked Mrs Harris for the parrot, but she gave it to Llew Trevarrow, a member to whom it had grown attached. It would fly from the cage to perch upon his shoulder while he played his favourite game of "nine card don". Eventually, Llew gave the bird to Taff Brain. Shortly afterwards it flew away, no more to be seen. By the way, Llew's brother, who lost an arm in the First World War and who, subsequently was known as "Dai One Arm" was taken ill during Eli Davies stewardship, and carried from the club to die. At the inquest, the steward stated that Dai drank 20 pints a day, and this statement given much publicity in the local press. Eli Davies was the first steward not to live in the clubhouse, which the committee then had converted as an extension to the existing premises. Tom Thomas, local contractor and undertaker carried out the extension at a cost of approximately £265, with architect's fees of £31: 10 : 0 extra. All this happened during 1937.

The record for the bar takings etc, is still with us. The entries for May 1937 being:-

Weekending	May 1 <sup>st</sup>	total banked	£35 : 1 : 4
"	" 8 <sup>th</sup>	"	£23 : 12 : 6
"	" 15 <sup>th</sup>	"	£22 : 12 : 10
"	" 22 <sup>nd</sup>	"	£52 : 10 : 0
"	" 29 <sup>th</sup>	"	£22 : 0 : 0

with payments to Thomas Morgan as follows:-

One Month's Beer	£109 : 16 : 4
Second Month's Beer	£154 : 0 : 9

Prior to Mr Davies becoming steward, the weekly bar takings averaged £48. Obviously he was not suited to the licensed trade, and just before Christmas 1937, Will Jones, son of Jack "Donkey" took over. He served the club for a number of years and was respected and popular with all members, some of whom were real characters – the brothers Tom and Harry Prior, both standing about five feet tall and each with a very bad chest. I cannot recall Harry ever working. They came from Blaina, and they would get the club into an uproar by always maintaining that everything and everybody was better in Blaina than in the Garw, no matter what one talked about – Rugby, Boxing, Brass Bands, Choirs and singers etc, they would chip in with "you don't know what your talking about. Back home we've got so and so who would knock yours into a box hat", and pandemonium would erupt. Then there was Dai Hughes "Farm", a big, rough looking man with a huge moustache. Dominos were his

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God. He was a good player too, but whenever beaten, in a gruff voice, he would always remark, "aye you were lucky then, lets have another game, I'll show you".

On the quoits board, the better players were Dick Jones "North", Wil Huxtable, Jack Fudge and George Clatworthy. Among the other members we find such as Owen Rowlands, a happy old chap with a passion for "nine card don". As soon as he entered the club, he would look around to ask "who'll make up a four then", and there was William Lacey, our door-keeper, who also served upon the committee for many years, an erudite man, who smoked a clay pipe, never played any games, knowledgeable about politics and history, and to whom I never tired of listening.

Jack Welsh, Jack Davies "Bargoed", Fred Evans "Biff", Evan Morris, Didi Edmonds, Dai "Co-op", Dai Howells, Ianto "Butch", and "Taff" Brain are just a few of the other members I can call to mind, and with whom I often played cribbage or dominoes, best two games out of three for a pint. Singers who entertained at our "Go as you please" concerts included young Bert Pembroke, Wil Owen, Bill Bodenham and my brother Len Davies. Later came Dai Trigg, Tommy Toms, Llew Richards "Maesteg" and many more. Other long time members of the club are Jim Nicholls, Dai "Cardi", Wil Owen, Harry Bradley, Wil Jones "Sailor", Frank Cailes, Albert Griffiths and Jim Woods – for many years Vice Chairman.

Consequently upon the club being extended there was an influx of younger members some of whom went on to serve upon the committee, my brother Len being one and Denny Mapstone another. About this time the game of quoits went out of favour – darts taking over in its place. Prominent members of the clubs darts team were Wil Huxtable, George Clatworthy, Jack Fudge, Dai "Farm", Arthur and Denny Mapstone, Len Davies, Bert Pembroke, Dai Richards "Maesteg", Morien Morgan, Tom Williams "Patch" and Fred Major.

As I have earlier mentioned, Wil Jones became steward just before Christmas 1937, from then on the club began to prosper, making rapid progress.

From the beginning of 1937, conditions throughout the land began to improve with regular work in the mining industry, and factories, idle for years, re-opened for full production. The Government started to build arsenals and to lay airfields. The person responsible for this activity being Adolf Hitler, Chancellor of Germany, who had commenced to reclaim what he believed to be German Territories, when he failed by negotiation he sent in his armies with great success, and as a whole, the German nation worshipped him. However, he was a threat to other European nations – Belgium, France and Great Britain included, hence the country's efforts to re-arm in readiness for any future clash. About 1937, the building of Bridgend arsenal began. Many from the valley worked on the building, hundreds – including women, found employment there.

Trade in the club improved considerably as can be seen from the following figures for May 1938, as compared with those for the same month in the previous year.

Bar Takings May 2 <sup>nd</sup>	£62.13.11
9 <sup>th</sup>	£73.0.9
16 <sup>th</sup>	£58.3.7
23 <sup>rd</sup>	£52.1.0
30 <sup>th</sup>	£63.15.6

One of the practices of the club was the allocation of one check, redeemable for one pint, to every member attending at the Annual General Meeting. Another was the granting of fifteen shillings (pyjama money) for each of those who had to go to

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hospital as an in-patient – this concession still applies, and members convalescing after injury or illness were allowed to go to Langland Bay, one of Club Union's Rest Homes, on the Gower Coast, for two weeks at no cost, each one receiving £2 pounds as spending money. Any small, odd jobs about the club were carried out by older members who were rewarded with redeemable beer "checks".

I should have told you that by this time, the serving counter in the bar had been re-sited to where had been the old beer cellar, which had been moved to an outbuilding to the rear of the club, and the serving counter itself had been furnished with two twin-engine beer pulls.

On Saturday and Sunday evenings a waiter was put on to serve the upper floor, with its committee room, library and smaller room used by the Secretary, and wherein was his desk etc, rooms used on weekends to take the overspill from the bar, and where card games and the like were played. I think the committee at this time consisted of Jim Woods, Dai Curtis, Tom Rees, Fred Major, Evan Morris, George Clatworthy, William Lacey, Harry "Bach", Maurice Evans, Gwilym John, Len Davies and Fred Walters.

1938 was the first year for paid holidays for miners. One week with full pay, but with a shilling deducted for every week's absence from work without good reason. That same year, one of our members met with an unusual death. Jim Pinnell, who was pulling out at pit bottom at the Carn Colliery when he fell into the sump and drowned. I was driving in what was known as "The Marble Arch", bringing my trams direct to pit bottom. On landing, on this occasion, my trams ran into the sump boards. No doubt one of them broke. Jim apparently did not notice this, slipped thereon, and fell through. Stan ?????? was hitching and the manager was Mr Bundy. During the same month, Wil John also was killed in the "Marble Arch".

And so to 1939, the most wonderful year of my life, for on Easter Monday April 10<sup>th</sup> I married Peggy Roberts. After the nuptials, we spent the day in Cardiff, where we enjoyed the film "The Citadel" starring Robert Donat. I returned to work on the Wednesday.

War clouds were now in the air. Hitler had invaded several countries annexing them to a growing German empire. The slogan of the German people was "Guns Before Butter", and the threat of world domination was indeed menacing. At the end of August, Hitler invaded Poland, and on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of September, on behalf of the British Nation, the Prime minister, Neville Chamberlain, declared war on Germany. Mobilisation for total warfare was the order of the day, and we were all issued with gas masks, and the rationing of vital commodities, namely food and fuel, was introduced. The local Defence Volunteers, the LDV was formed and air raid wardens and National Service Firemen were recruited. On November the 28<sup>th</sup>, my first child, Gloria, was born. That day I worked an extra half shift ostling, instead of Shoni "Cwrlin" (John Thomas) another old club member. When I arrived home, about 4.30pm, I was greeted with the words "Welcome home Daddy".

Wil Jones the steward, an Army reservist, was recalled to the colours just before Christmas 1939. For some few weeks his wife carried on, and then in January, 1940, Hugh Jordan took over. Jordan lived in a house opposite the club. At the time, bar takings were up to about £70 per week. Before going any further, I should mention that in 1939 the club secretary Dai Hughes "Cryer" passed away, a faithful servant to the club, he had held office for some seventeen years, his successor, William Hughes Meredith came to office at the late age of 65 years. He had been a fireman at the Carn Colliery for most of his working life and has been secretary to the Fireman and Deputies association. When he resigned office, after about two years, he

became the club librarian, until he died at the age of 85 years. He was a very learned man – industrious, efficient and scrupulously clean both in habit and dress. Up to the time of his demise, his handwriting was firm and beautiful to read. During the time he was secretary, when his assistant was Dai Harris, he worked at the Bridgend arsenal.

The war was still in its infancy, and the shortage of essential goods such as bacon, eggs, meat and sugar was beginning to bite, for the amounts allocated by rationing were, to say the least, very small. Beer also was in short supply, and its shortage often gave rise to humorous situations. Clubs and pubs would only open for about four days a week, and for so many hours on certain nights, and it was a common sight to see a pub's doors, opened at say eight o'clock, being packed to capacity within a few minutes. After an hour or so, in all probability, the landlord would call out "that's it boys, you've had it for tonight", and there would be a hurried drinking up, and a scurrying to some other pub rumoured to be open. Once there aware of the stampede, mine host would cry out "sorry boys, you're out of luck, I've just run dry". It's stop tap for tonight. There would be moans and groans and oftentimes rude remarks, followed by a trek around the pubs thought to be open, hoping for better fortune. Some landlords took advantage of the shortage openly to discriminate against those they wished not to serve. They would be left standing at the counter while others, later arrivals, were served ahead of them, and they were fortunate to get even a pint.

Clubs, nationally, were better organised than the public houses, the committee of our club, for example, kept the place open for about two hours each evening, nevertheless there still were many dry nights. It caused a smile to see thirsty regulars searching around for a drink, many venturing to the neighbouring villages, and even going as far a field as Bridgend, Wick, Blackmill, and Gilfach Goch, then returning without success, to find that one of the local watering holes had been open the whole time. Whenever the brewer's dray appeared at any local pubs and clubs, the word would spread like wildfire.

Out steward, Hugh Jordan served the club from January 1940 until May 1941, when he left to work at the arsenal. One of our committee, Fred Major, followed him, taking over on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of May. Jordan subsequently met with a tragic end – run down by a railway engine.

Like villages and towns all over Britain, Blaengarw was paying the awful price of war, when young men like Bramwell Jenkins – the bandmasters son, Alwyn Richards "Maesteg", Ron and Ray Thomas – the shoemaker's sons, Tommy Jones "Kipper", Doug Weston, Dai Harris – a club member and brother to Mrs Jones our former stewardess, Bobby Struthers, Stan Jones "Panto", Alfie Jones and many others made the ultimate sacrifice.

In 1940, a coalition Government was formed under the premiership of Winston Churchill. Ernest Bevin, the docker's leader became minister for labour and during his term of office, coal mining became number one priority. Young men, thereafter known as "Bevin Boys", as an alternative to the armed forces were conscripted into the mines, few, however, enjoyed the calling of the miner, preferring the "Forces". Their conscription brought home to those ignorant of the conditions in the mines the unpleasant and hazardous task of the miner, and their sentiments were frequently reported in the national press.

About this time, collieries were being provided with canteens, the one at Carn sited in an old zinc garage, and filled with soaps, towels, pasties, pies, cakes and anything the canteen secretary could lay his hands on. Mrs Edwards of Blaengarw Road was the first manageress. When the first purpose built canteen was built, each

miner was given a free meal. Thereafter, a cooked dinner with dessert cost one shilling. Through foolish pride, and perhaps "snobbery", however, many did not take advantage of this much-needed amenity.

Owing to William Merediths age, 65 years, he only served as Secretary for about two years. He resigned in December 1941, when his assistant Dai Harris took over, unopposed, in January 1942, Fred Major was still the steward. The average monthly bar takings were then about £90. The steward, who was living in his own house, No2 Glanberris Terrace, was paid £8.17.4 per week, exclusive of heating and lighting costs. Excise duty at three pence in the pound on all intoxicants sold throughout the year was £38.2.0, and rates for the half-year ending December 1941 were £43.1.0. The club was running a three-penny raffle every weekend, with the proceeds going towards the annual outing. The prizes were thirty shillings and fifteen shillings, and the ticket sellers were Stan Ward and Gwilym John, William Meredith was the librarian and William Lacey the doorman.

Because of its shortage, the club was unable to shop around for beer, other than from their sole supplier, Thomas Morgan. The weekly bill for beer was somewhere in the region of £75, and throughout the duration of the war, the committee tried, but in vain, to have its quota increased. The club however, managed to accrue a little capital during this time, and they established a fund whereby members who were serving soldiers, returning on leave, were each granted a cigarette parcel.

As with beer, cigarettes also were in short supply, licensed premises and shops being allocated a limited quota. They imposed their own form of rationing, but there still was favouritism shown, with "under the counter dealings". Whenever a delivery was made to the club, each member was allocated a packet of ten, nevertheless there was still some who continued to get more than their fair share, and of course bickering and argument ensued.

A practice of the club was to return to the brewery any beer which was cloudy or not tasting right, but one Sunday, when the only barrel left was found to be wanting, and after the committee had decided to return it, there was a storm of protest from the members, who insisted that it be sold, believing no doubt that bad beer was better than no beer at all. The committee capitulated, giving the steward orders to serve it. It was as thick and cloudy as soup, but within the hour it was all gone, members swearing it was OK.

Around about this time, the four clubs in the valley organised an inter club football tournament with the proceeds to be donated to Cardiff Royal Infirmary. I was appointed secretary to the committee, which by running dances and raffles, and by cajoling the two local cinemas to put on a Sunday evening film show with the admission charges to be allocated to the fund, was able, proudly to present a cheque in the sum of £200.10.0 to the Infirmary. The games were great fun, and a keen rivalry between the clubs, each of which included several older members in the team, despite the rivalry, all games were played with gusto, but with humour, and of course, sportsmanship prevailing. The Veteran's club of Pontycymmer won the cup in the first year and the Blaengarw club in the second.

At this time the club suffered its first and only war time casualty when one of the members, Dai Harris, brother of one time steward Mrs Jones, and already mentioned, forfeited his life while serving in the Mediterranean theatre of war. A plaque was struck in his memory, to hang in the bar, when later, the club was being renovated and extended, it was given to my brother Len, who had married Dai Harris's sister.

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Prior to and during the war the club ran Christmas tournaments for nine card don, cribbage, darts, quoits and knock-out with the winners receiving one pound and the runners up fifteen shillings, depending of course on the number of entries. The competition was taken very seriously, with winners regarding themselves as club champions.

Throughout the War years the pattern remained the same, shortage of all essential commodities, the carrying of identity cards, the constant bombing of our towns and cities, and everyone hoping and praying for an end to all the wanton destruction. April 8<sup>th</sup>, 1943 saw the birth of my son Michael, into a world of chaos and uncertainty, but by the beginning of 1945, with Germany crumbling, bombed unmercifully, and reeling back on all fronts, particularly in Russia, where their losses were devastating, unconditional surrender was in the offing.

During the later years of the war, I had been assistant secretary to Dai Harris, and in 1945, I resigned to oppose him and Dai Thomas "Cobbler" opposed Georgie Morris as chairman. I failed, but Dai Thomas succeeded, most surprisingly unseating Georgie.

In April 1945, the club bought the house adjoining for £265, and in May, Wil Jones returned from the forces to take over as steward, taking up residence in the newly acquired house. Bar takings for April 1945, under the stewardship of Fred Major were as follows:

April 6 <sup>th</sup>	£89.16.6
13 <sup>th</sup>	£86.4.6
20 <sup>th</sup>	£106.0.6
27 <sup>th</sup>	£107.11.0

Considering that the price charged for beer had increased since 1937/38 from Four pence and sixpence a pint to ten pence and eleven pence a pint, trade obviously was controlled by the still remaining shortage.

Dai Thomas did not last long as chairman. Ten months I think, and Georgie was returned unopposed to the office he had for so long held, but after one year he resigned. He had served faithfully and efficiently for twenty-five years, and it remains a mystery to me that the club did not recognise such service in the appropriate manner. As a result Wil Jones "Tubby" and Wil Strickland vied with each other for office, Wil Jones succeeding by one vote.

The club had managed by dint of careful management to amass a fair amount of capital, and the committee began to consider the possibility of further extension to the building. Due to building restrictions, however, this was not possible, at least for the time being. Labour and building materials were in short supply, and available only for the construction of hospitals, schools and houses. Planning permission was necessary, and places such as clubs were low on the agenda, hence the club had to wait its turn.

Our sole supplier of beer in 1945 was still Morgan Thomas. On checking the records, I find that it was April 1946 before another beer was introduced to the club, Crosswell's.

Bar takings for April 1947, two years after the previous reading were:

April 7 <sup>th</sup>	£258.0.8
14 <sup>th</sup>	£147.3.0
21 <sup>st</sup>	£119.11.8
28 <sup>th</sup>	£176.18.6

After two years, there was an increase of some £222 per month.

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In October 1945, there was a general election, when the Labour party, under Clement Attlee, were returned to Parliament with an overwhelming majority of some 250 seats. This was a very pleasing happening, especially for the miners, who for thirty years had campaigned for such a victory.

1946 saw the nationalisation of the mines, when the government took them over – vesting date, the first of January 1947. The country was then enjoying a post war boom, and for years to come a period of real prosperity was enjoyed by all, with unemployment a thing of the past. Working people were buying their own homes and cars, and all in all, the future looked decidedly rosy.

In 1947, something happened which was to have a profound effect on the well being of the club – the opening of the W.E.X.A. club in November 1947, in the old premises of D Watts Thomas, at the bottom of David Street, a property, we ourselves had once tried to obtain. The W.E.X.A. was formed by the younger element in the village, and it is to their credit that they made rapid progress by virtue of their new approach to club life. Quite a large number of our members deserted us to join the new club, and some of the remaining members spent a considerable amount of their time there, attracted by the entertainment and better accommodation. The chairman was Wil Day and secretary Theo Goss. Later Theo resigned, to be replaced by Wil Day. The effect of the new opening on our club can be measured by a considerable drop in monthly taking - £209 in April 1948 as against April 1947. From 1948 on, in face of such competition we had a continual struggle, and members were constantly carping and complaining to the committee about the successful progress made by the W.E.X.A. In fairness to the committee, however, one must realise that the proposed Extension, which would allow for extra space in the club, was precluded by the Town and Country Planning restriction. Even though there was sufficient capital, we were unable to proceed.

Back to the beer, to find that in an attempt to appease the remaining members different brews were introduced – Felinfoil ales, Llandovery ales, and for about six months in 1947, Brains, and cider was supplied by Evans and Ridler. To give members a better and more efficient service, a small open bar was built in the upstairs concert room, thereby dispensing with waiters and others carrying trays upstairs. One of the members, a carpenter and undertaker, Fred Hodges, built the bar, which though not perfect was indeed a vast improvement.

Towards the end of the year, the committee decided to apply to the Ministry for permission to extend the premises, with this in view, they enlisted the services of an architect, Mr Tudor Isaac to provide drawings for the provision of toilets and an additional room adjoining the upstairs concert room. Permission eventually was granted, and in April 1950, Sal Canton of Pontycymmer began the work. On perusing the records, I find that the cost was £1,589 with architect's fees of £64.8.0. The additional room was used for committee meetings, as a games room and as a dressing room for visiting concert parties, who prior to this, changed behind a curtain in a corner of the concert room.

Although the committee were doing their utmost to improve conditions in the club, we were still trailing behind the WEXA, and throughout 1950 and 1951, members were still seeking the comfort and entertainment available there. In addition, they had a choice of beers – Truman's and Mitchell and Butlers, while we, at the club remained faithful to Thomas Morgan of Pontyclun, a beer that could compare with theirs. The annoying thing was that whilst the big drinkers were still club members, they spent most of their time at the WEXA, as associate members, nevertheless we still had our regulars, who remained 100% loyal, but by and large, the effects of the

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new club were beginning to show to an alarming extent, causing great anxiety to the committee. The following figures for bar takings for the month of January 1951, as compared with the same month in 1947 highlight the difference:

January 8 <sup>th</sup>	£150.17.3
15 <sup>th</sup>	£112.14.0
22 <sup>nd</sup>	£128.11.7
29 <sup>th</sup>	£129.19.11

A decrease overall of £180.11.1 and since 1947, the price of a pint had risen to one shilling and two pence, an increase of two pence. It was obvious that something drastic had to be done otherwise the club would face eventual disaster. We were running an outing fund, which each year provided member's wives and children with a trip to the seaside, Barry or Porthcawl, according to the strength of the fund, and even this was becoming more difficult to keep going, due to lack of financial support.

During 1951, my brother Bill was assistant secretary to Dai Harris who resigned from office in August. I was approached by several members to apply for the post, but to be perfectly honest I could not, at the time, see any future for the club, and did not relish the task of steering it to its former prominence, but after considerable thought and a lot more persuasion from members, I acquiesced, and reluctantly stood for office. I was opposed by Moc Roberts, and was elected by just a few votes. Had I lost I would not have been greatly concerned, but having been elected, I decided to do everything I possibly could to make a go of it, and if the club went down it would not be for the want of trying. The first committee I sat with consisted of – Wil Jones “Tubby” - chairman, Bill Davies – assistant secretary, Maurice Evans, Tom Evans “Red”, Dai Curtis, Len Davies, Wil Owen, George Tucker, Fred Taylor, Jim Woods, Jack Fudge, George Clatworthy, Buller Dent and Wm Griffiths – treasurer. That was on September 16, 1951, and I realised then that my task was going to be even greater than I anticipated. Besides getting continual prods and complaints from members, I was also the butt of derisory comments from WEXA members who jeered “that I was trying to revive a dead duck”, a common saying of theirs being “that the WEXA were going to buy the Top Club for a P\*\*\* house”, such remarks however, only spurred me on, determined to make them eat their words, but the prospect ahead of me was to say the very least a daunting one. If we were to recapture past trade something would have to be done regarding the provision of an alternative beer, and also of better entertainment, but finance was still hard to come by. With this in mind, the committee introduced a weekly lottery based on the first and last letters of Sunday's “News of the World” headline, with a first prize of ten pounds for the ticket with the letters in the correct order, and five pounds for the ticket showing the reverse order. Tickets were priced at one shilling each.

The lottery, which was the first of its kind in the valley, caused much controversy regarding its legality, even members condemned it, saying the police would step in to prevent it, and outsiders maintained it was the beginning of the end for the Top Club. Notwithstanding the doubts, however, it was agreed by the committee and authorised on December 16, 1951. If successful, it was surmised that the profit would be ten pounds per week. I was a little concerned about its possible success and also of the police, reaction etc, but almost immediately there was an overwhelming demand for tickets, and I realised that barring interference, it was a winner, and the answer to our financial problems. None of the other clubs would introduce it and for a considerable time we were given a free hand, without opposition, and by the time they had realised that no objection was forthcoming, about two and half years had elapsed, and we had accrued a sum of £2,500 in our

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deposit account. We had ceased to trade with Thomas Morgan and were selling Crosswell's and Fern Vale. We also tried Brains and Simmonds, and on November 16, 1951, to give the members no cause for complaint about the choice of beers, we began trading with the Ely Brewery Company. The introduction of their beers was a tremendous improvement to our sales, and together with the proceeds from the "headline tickets", we began to make steady progress financially.

On March 2, 1952, Wil Jones, the steward, gave notice to terminate his employment, and we advertised the vacancy. My brother Bill resigned from office of assistant secretary, and together with Ivor Richards "Boots" and Jenkin Jenkins of Gilfach Goch, was short listed, the position eventually going to Jenkins, Bill losing by nine votes to six. After one week, Jenkins was dismissed without notice, being inefficient and completely incapable of carrying out the duties required of a steward. This was the prelude to a quick turn over in stewards beginning with Ivor Richards "Boots" who had taken over from Jenkins.

When I took office in September 1950, my salary was seventeen and sixpence per week, but in March 1952, it was increased to one pound and five shillings. During the same year, we dispensed with the open corner bar upstairs and divided the long committee room, one part remaining for the committee, the other used as a serving bar. The committee room could barely accommodate the committee. When anyone was being interviewed, someone had to get up to stand in the doorway. The serving bar, however, was a vast improvement, making for more room in the concert hall.

On the 21<sup>st</sup> of September, 1952, when my brother was assistant secretary, Ivor "Boots", after seven months as steward, was given notice to quit, and his termination caused a certain amount of discontent amongst the members who organised a petition demanding a requisition meeting for an explanation of the circumstances surrounding his dismissal. Although the committee's explanation was accepted, quite a few members thought the fault was with me, trying to be dictatorial, and I was openly accused of being a "Big Head".

After Ivor "Boots". Ike Owen was appointed to the post of steward. Ike, was a local boy, who had made his name as a Rugby League player, having starred for Great Britain on tour "down under", informed us one week later that he could not accept, just when we thought we might be approaching a period of some stability. George Tucker, one of our committeemen, who had been acting as steward temporarily, was given the job permanently.

In March, 1953, the committee was made up of the following members – Morgan "Moc" Roberts, Tommy Toms, Dai Williams "Buff", Buller Dent, Len Davies, George Clatworthy, Reg Davies, Holberry Williams, Dai Curtis, Tom Bevan, Maurice Evans, Wil Owen and Jack Fudge. My brother opposed Wil Jones "tubby" for the office of chairman, defeating him by one vote. This, however, was not unusual, Wil "Tubby" himself having defeated Wil Strickland by the same margin. An unusual situation then existed – the secretary, chairman, and one committeeman were brothers, with another Reg Davies, a brother in law. A disgruntled faction began, at every available opportunity, grumbling, intimating, that the club was now a Davies club. Many times I felt like resigning.

Just before Christmas 1952, on December 7<sup>th</sup>, the club was burgled, some twelve guineas worth of spirits being stolen. The culprit was never found. For that same Christmas, members were each given ten checks. In addition, OAP members were given ten shillings. During this time, the club still maintained a waiter service upstairs, on Saturday and Sunday evenings, and a permanent pianist was engaged – Mrs Edwards of Brynmenyn, nevertheless, the WEXA remained the big attraction. To

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help combat this, the club introduced a free weekly draw of five shillings for the lucky member who was present while the draw was taking place. If a member whose number was drawn was not present, there would be a "rollover", five shillings being added to the prize for the following week, and so on. When the prize reached a pound or so, there would be a good attendance on the draw night, but otherwise there was not much of an improvement.

In an effort to further stimulate trade, the committee engaged such public figures as Walter Padley M.P., John Evans M.P. and Wil Paynter, president of the National Union of Mineworkers, to address the members, but response was poor. We were averaging seven and half barrels per week, and the "headline tickets", were still making about ten pounds, but progress towards financial security was painfully slow. At the beginning of George Tucker's time as steward, trade improved, but after about eight months, our records began to indicate a steady decrease. Tucker began, openly, to flaunt the authority both of the committee and myself, maintaining that we were not doing justice to the members, yet when he himself had served on the committee, the situation had been exactly the same.

January 1954, saw the resignation as chairman, of my brother Bill, with Buller Dent eventually taking over office. A new brew was given a trial, Truman's, but for some reason or other, it failed to gain popularity, even though it was a success in the WEXA. The same year, we lost our treasurer, WH Griffiths, who passed away on the 28<sup>th</sup> of June, after serving for thirty years. He was a truly good and honourable man who, together with George Morris and Dai Harris had done much to establish and secure the future of the club. We also lost Owen Beynon; a grand old member aged seventy-six years.

In the summer of fifty four, we purchased a cricket set for thirty four pounds for the use of younger members, but after about five games it was put aside, later to be sold to the youth club for five pounds. Consequent upon the demise of WH Griffiths, the club dispensed with office of Treasurer, and I became Financial Secretary with Trevor Owen as my assistant. I soon came to know the thankless task of the committee and club officials, and began to despair of our ever succeeding, despite our efforts, such as the introduction of the "headline tickets", and later the "tote", both of which had superseded the old football sweep, so ably run by Tom Bevan and "Skip" Gardiner.

On October the tenth, George Tucker tendered his notice, and once again we were looking for a steward. "Pro tem", young Bert Pembroke took over. We received two applications for the position, one from Wil Quick, former tenant of "The Squirrel Hotel" in Pontycymmer, and the other from one of our own members, Holberry Williams, the latter being successful, commencing his duties in October the 31<sup>st</sup>.

In the first three years of office, I had already seen five stewards serve the club, with unbeknownst to myself, more to come. I did think, however, that with the appointment of Holberry, there might be the possibility of a decent length of service.

For Christmas, members were again given ten checks, with OAPs getting an additional ten shillings, and for the first time we held a party for member's children, when each child was given five shillings. The assistant secretary's salary which for long had stood at five pounds per annum was increased to ten pounds, and the committee since I took office in 1951 had almost completely changed, being now composed of – Trevor Owen – assistant secretary, Buller Dent – chairman, Jack Fudge, Len Davies, Fred Davies, Gwilym John, Wil Ellis, "Skip" Gardiner, Tommy Toms, Teddy Morris, Dai Curtis, Jackie Rees, Reg Davies, Fred Taylor, and Arthur

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Richards "Maesteg". Mrs Edwards had finished as our pianist. In her place at fifteen shillings per night we appointed Mel Wedlake.

In August, 1955, Buller Dent withdrew his name from the ballot for election of chairman, and Bill Davies was returned unopposed. At the time, we were using the upstairs bar almost regularly, with the downstairs room used only at weekends. We were doing our utmost to revive our flagging trade, with our competition, the WEXA going from strength to strength. The committee and officials was still the subject of taunts from some members, with their continual moaning that "the WEXA would jump over our heads". They were unjustified of course, for our plans were always restricted by lack of space and the poor layout of the club.

We received another bombshell, when on January the 17<sup>th</sup> 1956; the steward Holberry Williams tendered his notice, after serving us for only about eighteen months. After advertising the position, we received three applications, from Trevor Sims of Caerau, Alf Evans of Pontycymmer and V Jones of Pontlottyn. The committee voted as follows – T Sims four votes, Alf Evans and V Jones three each. The latter two names were put in a hat and V Jones was pulled out. The committee voted again – Jones and Sims tying with five votes each. This time Trevor Sims name was drawn from the hat, and he became the new steward, commencing his duties on February 12<sup>th</sup> 1956.

On April 2<sup>nd</sup>, a special committee meeting was called to discuss the possibility of extension to the club premises, and it was decided to approach Mr Dai Percy Davies who lived next door to the club, with a view to purchasing his house and to move the steward in, thereby leaving the steward's quarters free for such extension. It was agreed that Mr Davies be offered the sum of six hundred pounds, and when he informed us that he was interested, we were jubilant, visualising a big improvement to our premises. We were soon to be disillusioned, however, when Mr Davies, realising our plight, wishing to obtain as high a price as possible agreed, after negotiation, and a sum of eight hundred and fifty pounds, two hundred and fifty more than our original offer. One week after agreeing this new figure, he withdrew, to ask for one thousand pounds. Amazed by this demand, and naturally disappointed, the committee ceased negotiations, to reconsider the other options open to them. Gloom and despondency again prevailed, but Mr Davies's refusal later turned out to be a blessing in disguise, for events were to prove how fortune was to smile upon us.

By that time, we had some £3,100 set aside for development. With this in mind, we decided to approach the C.W.S. Bank with a view to securing a loan of a further £4,000. Fortunately our meeting did not bear fruit, for they were prepared to loan only £2,000, and the committee did not feel disposed to accept anything which would not guarantee the complete updating and refurbishment of the club. During the negotiations, we again experienced steward trouble, with Trevor Sims tendering his notice to terminate in July 1956, having served for a mere six months, and on August the 29<sup>th</sup>, Trevor Jones of Clydach took over.

During the previous twelve months, we were confronted with repeated resignations of members, our Register becoming ever smaller, and our aspirations dwindled, for despite our capital, limited though it was, our hopes for improving the club had met with an impasse.

September 1956 saw the introduction of the Tote Double lottery, an innovation which proved to be a tremendous fillip to our finances, the WEXA having introduced the same several months earlier. With prizes ranging from fifty pound to two hundred, the "Tote" proved to be much more popular than the "Headline ticket" with its prize of ten pounds, and which it superseded.

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The same month saw the introduction of Simmonds Ales, and Mitchell and Butler's bottled beers. Simmonds, however, failed to tempt the palate of the faithful, and after a month or so was withdrawn.

In October, the committee made a momentous decision, one, which was to prove the turning point in my story. They approached the Ely Brewery, seeking the financial assistance, which, would enable them to modernise the club, to bring it to a standard comparable with any in the area. Reg Davies and Bill Davies were delegated to meet the Ely directorate. They brought back the news that Ely were prepared to give us their wholehearted support, it having been pointed out to them of course that we wanted the best possible advice, and that only a completely modern club would be acceptable. To their credit, the Brewery were not found wanting, sending us their architect, and with no further ado, the wheels were set in motion for the scheme to go ahead. Plans for the proposed extension were drawn up and submitted to the various authorities for approval. Reg, Bill and myself then met the Board at Ely to finalise the arrangements for financing the project, and I must tell you that the Board were tickled pink when they were made aware that the chairman and secretary were brothers, with the assistant secretary a brother in law. Good humouredly, they quipped "what a set up" and "oh boy what a racket". The terms agreed upon were decidedly generous – ten months extended credit, architects services free, all legal advice free and the amount of repayment per week left entirely to us – as much as we could afford. There were no guarantees and nothing was signed. They were relying upon our gratitude, expressing itself by our passing on to them any increase in trade, which would undoubtedly accrue. Their generosity can be best illustrated by telling you that the extended credit they had allowed was £5,982.7.10. Had we borrowed this sum from the Bank, the interest rate would have been some £300 per annum. In addition, the architect's fee would have been £280, so you can now realise how fortunate we were when Mr Davies turned down our offer to purchase his property for £850.

At the time of this transaction, the committee was made up of the following members – Bill Davies – chairman, Trevor Owen – entertainment secretary, "Skip" Gardiner, Doug Scourfield, Tommy Toms, Teddy Morris, Jackie Rees, Jack Davies "Carn", Arthur Peake, Arthur Richards "Maesteg", Fred Davies and Reg Davies – vice chairman. Since 1954, there had been seven changes, and from the time I became secretary in 1951, only Bill Davies who then was assistant secretary remained. For Christmas 1956, each member was given twelve checks, with OAPs not working receiving an extra fifteen shillings. Bar takings for January 1957 were –

January 4 <sup>th</sup>	£204.11.1
11 <sup>th</sup>	£206.15.9
18 <sup>th</sup>	£201.7.10
25 <sup>th</sup>	£226.10.4
total	£889.4.0

an increase of £292.14.10 over the corresponding month in 1951. With beer over the six years concerned remaining at one shilling and two pence a pint, this showed a very satisfactory increase in our trading figures.

On April the 14<sup>th</sup> 1957, the committee introduced the game of "housey housey" or as it was alternatively known "Bingo". Once more they were faced with a storm of protest over the introduction of such a controversial form of lottery. The other valley clubs failed to accept its challenge and for a considerable time we were given a free hand to reap the financial benefit which resulted. The extra revenue and the increased profit from beer sales did much to strengthen the clubs finances. However, after a period of adverse publicity and the attention of the police, the game

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was accepted and played in all the valley clubs and by many other organisations as well, becoming the most popular lottery to be enjoyed nation wide.

The plans and specifications were duly presented by the Ely architect, and after some minor modifications were accepted by the committee. After approval by the Town and Country Planning Department, we advertised for tenders – to be submitted by the 1<sup>st</sup> of May, with the work to commence on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of June, 1957.

The following three tenders were received

Deaves of Cowbridge	£7,310.0.0
BL Davies Bryncethin	£5,960.10.0
Griffith Jones & Son Pontycymmer	£5,350.10.0

After due consideration, the contract was awarded to Griffith Jones & Son, undertakers as well as builders, the father long since deceased, the business passing on to the son, known locally as Dai “Coffin”, and the work commenced during the first week in June.

Ely Brewery again came to our aid by allowing us to store our fitments and furniture in the Blaengarw Hotel, free of charge, while the work was in progress, on condition that it was insured against fire and theft. During the course of the alterations, despite the almost extreme discomfort, members were wholly supportive, pleased at last that something tangible was being done in their interest. With cement dust everywhere, they sat on boxes and benches without ever complaining, and to their credit they did not desert the club.

The work was completed by the second week of December 1957, and no one was more surprised than myself with the transformation. We now had a concert hall to accommodate approximately three hundred, newly furnished and fitted, with an up to date bar counter, a modern roomy stage, first class toilets and a beer cellar second to none. We also had a TV room, which could double as a dressing room for visiting concert parties. It was the unanimous opinion of members, associates and visitors that the club, for its size, was the equal of any in South Wales, and even the most critical of our members admitted that we had made a tremendous improvement since our early struggling days. The whole concept had entailed a considerable amount of time and effort being expended by officials and committee alike, no-one shirking his duties. Particular thanks, however must be paid to three men – Reg Davies, Bill Davies and Arthur Richards ‘Maesteg.’ I will forever be grateful to them for their untiring efforts, and their devotion to the cause, for myself words cannot express my gratitude to them, relieving me as they did of many of my day to day tasks, thus enabling me to concentrate on the work in hand.

Even though there yet was much to be done, we now enjoyed a better atmosphere in a comfortable environment and were able to look to the future with hope.

A humorous episode had arisen following the alterations, when it was decided that only a new piano was good enough, and we offered the old one for sale before purchasing another. There was however, no offer forthcoming, and so we arranged that ‘Freed’ of Cardiff should auction it for us. It was sold at a Pontypridd auction sale, and after the auctioneer’s fees and transport costs had been deducted, we received the munificent sum of twelve shillings.

Of all the problems now facing the Committee, the most pressing was the repayment of our loan, approximately £6000. With this in mind, the Committee decided that in an effort to stimulate trade, we should introduce member’s wives to the club on Saturday evenings, and they were first admitted on New Years Eve 1937. About six months earlier, a ballot had been held on whether or not wives should be allowed into the club – the result had been a definite no. Naturally when the Committees decision

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was made known, it caused a violent stream of protest. Older members were aghast at the proposed invasion of their privacy, forecasting disaster, and young and old alike were united, feeling that the last bastion of privacy left to the working man was being threatened, that their one sanctuary from the nagging of their women folk was being destroyed, and the inevitable threat of mass resignation ensued. It was felt that the Committee's decision would mean the inevitable end of the club. As I have earlier remarked, older members were dumbfounded, shaking their heads to exclaim that the Committee had made the gravest and most stupid mistake of all time – that they had committed 'club suicide'. Events were to prove very much to the contrary, however, and gradually, as time went by, members old and young, who had bitterly opposed their decision, came to accept it, praising them for the stand they had taken. The other clubs were slow to follow suit, openly condemning and criticising our action, and again we were given a free hand to enjoy the financial reward which followed, but when it became apparent that their members and their wives were flocking to our social evenings, within twelve months, they relented, reviewing their earlier opinions and were forced to admit defeat, by allowing members wives to enter their premises, Pontycymer Constitutional however remained faithful to the old order, and still do not allow women into the club.

Another humorous incident arose as a result of the alterations – when we were left with a large amount of surplus building materials etc, down pipes, guttering, sheets of corrugated iron, chains, doors and windows, some with frames, gas and electrical fires and oddments of timber, all for disposal. It was decided to hold a sale on a specified Saturday morning at the rear of the club. The day came and Reg Davies and myself went around with a piece of chalk pricing the various items. Unaware of the real value, our prices were ridiculously low. This did not stop one wag in the crowd shouting out 'look they're putting prices on the bloody stones as well'.

The impact of the alterations and the admission of members wives is best reflected in the increase in bar takings for January 1959 as against those for the corresponding month in 1957 –

January 7 <sup>th</sup>	£288. 12. 2
January 16 <sup>th</sup>	£291. 14. 0
January 23 <sup>rd</sup>	£277. 5. 4
January 30 <sup>th</sup>	£297. 19. 10
	£1,154.11.4

an increase of £316.7.4 per month or, approximately £80 per week.

Members who earlier resigned were returning to the fold, and we were also attracting a younger element. It seemed that we had turned the corner, and were on our way to regaining our former popularity, our task now being to consolidate our success, and to stay ahead of the WEXA, where it appears that roles were reversed, with their members goading and criticising officials and committee about the Top Club, as we were known, and its progress.

During the early part of 1958, our continued success was blighted when in March, Trevor Jones the steward, tendered his notice, and once again we were forced to advertise. There were five applications, and after eliminating two, we were left with Reg Davies – our Chairman, who had resigned his office, W. H. Nicol of Senghenydd and George Salmon of Bridgend. The ensuing ballot gave 5 votes to Davies, 3 to Nicol, and 1 to Salmon. After consideration, however, Reg withdrew, and eventually Bert Nicol was appointed gaining 6 votes to Salmon's 1. And as, during my six years or so in office, eight stewards had served the club. I began to despair even of finding one, who would settle, to remain with us over the foreseeable future, but with better

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accommodation to offer, improved conditions of service, a friendlier atmosphere and closer co-operation with the Committee, I had high hopes that Bert Nicol would be the one.

In May of 1958, we lost one of our old members, Arthur Sutton. Speaking of departed members, the previous year saw the passing of two of our founders – Fred Evans ‘Biff’ why Biff I’ll never know and Evan Morris, his boyhood friend and lifelong companion, happy to be together, they enjoyed all that the club had to offer, particularly the games – cards and dominoes. Evan, a confirmed bachelor, was a brother to George, our Chairman. I cannot even recall him having worn a necktie, always the old-fashioned neckerchief or ‘muffler’, crossed over a welsh flannel shirt. Fred was of much the same nature as his friend and my fondest memories of him are his love for club games and his passion for brown serge suits. I cannot recall him ever wearing another colour. They travelled life’s path together, and died within a fortnight of each other, both in their late sixties.

Bert Nicol, our steward had become very popular, and that popularity, together with the playing of ‘bingo’ and the admittance of member’s wives saw a welcome increase in our trading figures, so much so that we were able to repay the Brewery some £100 per month, and at the same time to amass a limited amount of capital for ourselves. I thought - if only the steward were to stay with us, and trade continued to flourish, all our troubles would be behind us, but it wasn’t long before members began to complain that we did not have a lounge bar and games room and that they had to travel downstairs to the toilets, then I began to realise that the task of a club secretary was not a happy one. It was not that the members were wrong, for there yet was much to be done before they had the facilities to which they were entitled. To the credit of the committee, however, they accepted the complaints with fortitude, and once again set their minds to putting things right.

Following the resignation of Reg Davies, as Chairman, my brother Bill took over, with Doug Scourfield as his Vice Chairman. The pianist at the time, 1958, was Windsor Takell. The committee passed a resolution that member’s wives be allowed into the club every other Saturday night and it was recommended to the General Meeting that wives should become honorary members with restricted rights, but this was heavily defeated.

My brother did not last long as Chairman, resigning on the 14<sup>th</sup> of September, 1958. The result of the ensuing ballot for a new Chairman was as follows –

Reg Davies	81
Tommy Toms	55
Mac Roberts	23
Theo Goss	16

The committee decided on an exhaustive vote and so Reg Davies and Tommy Toms went to a further ballot, Reg gaining the victory by 94 votes to 65.

Christmas 1958 saw each member receiving twelve checks, with OAPs getting an extra ten shillings. In addition there was a free draw with prizes of one pound and ten shillings. New Years Eve brought a note of sadness, for we lost Jack Davies “Carn” or Jack “Whistler” as some called him. He was a committeeman whose sudden passing shocked us all. I find I have neglected to mention the demise of another of our old members, Bert Pembroke, or Bert “Pem” as he was better known. In June or July of 1958, he was found dead underground, in a man-hole by the side of the trunk belt. He was sixty-five years of age.

About this time, the valley lost one of its more well known sporting personalities – Cyril “Bunny” Eddington, who, more than once, had fought for the

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middleweight Championship of Wales, and who once went the distance with Tommy Farr. The same Farr who had lost a world Heavyweight contest to Joe Louis – narrowly on points.

The CIU, the Club and Institute Union had for years past organised courses for club members, giving them the opportunity to improve their knowledge of Club Law and Finance. It was a six months course, at the end of which participating members sat an examination. If successful, they were awarded a diploma and silver badge, and the right to the letters C.M.D. (Club Management Diploma) after their names. I enrolled for the course at the latter end of 1957, and sat the examination in the Ogmore Non Political in May 1958, I was very keen, studied hard and was proud to be successful. The club also was pleased, and the members, to show their appreciation presented me with a gold watch, suitably inscribed. I was the first and only CMD in the valley. The course is a wonderful opportunity for club members, and I thoroughly recommend it to all aspiring secretaries and chairmen. The knowledge gained thereby, especially in finance and bookkeeping saved our club hundreds of pounds.

In March 1959, a ballot was held for the position of Assistant Secretary between Fred Davies, who polled 112 votes and Dai Trigg, who polled 72 votes. In the same year an extractor fan was installed in the concert hall, the work being undertaken by one of our own members, Frank Smith, for the sum of £128.12.5, two earlier quotes had been received from specialist firms, both in excess of £300. June of 1959 was the first year we allowed the sale of bottled beers on Sundays, for consumption off the premises.

Throughout the year, the club became increasingly popular with both our takings and our membership increasing, but we still were faced with the justified complaints of members regarding the possibility of a lounge and games room and the provision of toilets on the upstairs floor, so it was decided by the committee to increase our monthly repayment figure to the Ely Brewery, hopefully to negotiate a further loan as soon as the present one was suitably reduced. For Christmas 1959, we granted members twenty checks each, with an additional two pounds for OAPs. We also held a Children's Christmas Party, each child receiving ten shillings.

Our pianist, Windsor Takell terminated his employment with us, and we engaged a member, Mel Wedlake, to replace him. The Balarat, correctly the Glengarw, had closed, it being the beginning of the end for the mining industry locally. The workmen there being dispersed among the valley's other pits - Carn, Ocean and Ffladau.

Before proceeding further, you have probably noticed that my handwriting has deteriorated somewhat and there is a lack of order in my presentation of the facts. Full of enthusiasm, I commenced the writing of this treatise in 1958, and I dashed off the years 1919 to 1957 with no trouble whatsoever, and then I tired a little and put it away. That was eleven years ago, and now in April 1969, I am attempting to complete my task, but I am very weary, and get fatigued too easily. From now onwards I ask your forgiveness for my poor writing, bad spelling and the lack of natural flow to my story. I do not possess the talent for such work, and I am well aware of my deficiencies, with that off my chest I can now carry on.

1960 saw the club going from strength to strength. In that year we introduced a saving stamp machine. For every sixpence inserted, one collected a saving stamp; such stamps were redeemed for cash twice a year – for the Annual holiday and at Christmas. Although the pay out was about £300, the scheme lacked the support of the majority of the members and was discontinued. We also tried Evans and Bevan's beers, but without success, and consequent upon the complaints of certain member's

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relatives, we stopped selling draught cider, the members concerned getting in such a dreadful state of drunkenness. In 1960, we re-introduced the annual outing – bound for Porthcawl, each child receiving ten shillings and member's wives five shillings. On October 2<sup>nd</sup> it was passed that member's wives should be allowed into the club on the weekdays Monday and Friday. For Christmas, we managed to give each member twenty checks with OAPs receiving an extra two pounds. There was a free draw on New Years Eve with prizes of two pounds and ten shillings for members and one pound and ten shillings for the ladies.

Mel Wedlake, out pianist, terminated his contract and we engaged George Frazer of Llangeinor in his, place playing on Saturday and Sunday evening for two pounds each night.

In February 1961, we made another very wise decision. Speculators were approaching club committees inviting them into installing the new gambling sensation – the fruit machine or one armed bandit, on a 50-50 take basis, fifty percent for the club and fifty percent for the speculators. We did not hesitate to turn down such a set up, opting instead to purchase a machine of our own, for the sum of £425. To our great delight, it paid for itself in ten weeks. Such was the huge profit. For some time to come the other local clubs were on the 50-50 take basis, but when they became aware of our good fortune, they soon followed our example to purchase their own machines. From the time of their installation, as with "bingo", fruit machines attracted the attentions of the law, nationally as well as locally, and it was some time before the courts ruled on their legality, provided that certain rules were observed.

In March 1961, we had a stroke of good fortune, when we engaged a pianist by the name of Harold Newton. He was an excellent performer, equally at home at the organ as well as the piano. He later brought along his two friends – a drummer, Byron Edwards, and a trumpeter known as "Doc". Funny, but for all the years we were acquainted, I never knew his other than as "Doc". To the point however, over the years this three-piece band was the reason for much of our popularity – accompanying local and visiting artists and playing for dancing, fortunately they are still with us.

Reg Davies, Harold and myself were delegated to go to Cardiff to arrange the purchase of a "Clavioline" we tried Cranes music store, and were told by an assistant of a Doctor in Abertridwr who wanted to sell one. We motored up to Abertridwr, and after negotiation, purchased the "Clavioline" for £55 half the price the doctor paid for it.

We introduced Younger's beer but it lasted for only ten weeks. Then our doorkeeper Jack Evans "Daddy" was dismissed to be replaced by Dai Harries and Jack Fudge. To the delight of the committee we had had another good year, so much so that at Christmas time we were able to give each member Thirty checks, with OAPs getting a further two pounds. There was a free draw for members and their wives with two prizes of two pounds and ten shillings. We also donated twenty pounds to the local Darby and Joan club.

1962 was the year licensing hours were change, "stop tap" extended to 10:30pm. That was on the first of March, the month we engaged the three-piece band earlier mentioned, on a permanent basis, and for the first time since I took office, the chairman was opposed at the annual election of officers. George Hooper defeating Reg Davies by 107 votes to 95. Alf Skinner was the vice chairman. George Hooper, however did not stay in office long, resigning in July, when Reg went back unopposed.

Such was the improvement in trade that we had practically cleared our debt to

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Ely who by then had been taken over by Rhymney and Crowell's. We made another approach to them regarding the possibility of our securing a further loan, and Reg and Alf Skinner and I were delegated to meet their Board. At the time we were also selling Truman's and we also approached them. Finally we agreed on a straight loan from Rhymney of £3300, and on a similar sum from Truman's, but on extended credit, which eventually came to £3870. Once again we were amazed at securing loans, which including the previous one from Ely totalled some £15000, and all interest free. In addition, Rhymney allowed us the services of their Architect, Mr Bob Turpin, free. The wheels were then set in motion for the second phase of the club extension – new lounge and skittle alley, with upstairs toilet facilities etc. In order to undertake any further extension, however, we would need to utilize the steward's house next door to the club. With this in mind, we approached Mrs Davies, who lived in the adjoining house, with an offer to purchase. An offer in excess of £850 Mr Davies now deceased, had some years before turned down, but she refused. We then decided to purchase a vacant premises across the road from the club, number 38, for £650, plus a further £140 for the freehold, to accommodate the steward.

Christmas came around again, and bearing in mind the need to conserve in order to meet the cost of the proposed extension, we allocated the members but twenty checks, with an extra two pounds for OAPs, and stopped the prize draw and the children's party.

Our plan to remove Bert Nicol the steward to number 38 did not sit well with him and it was too obvious that we were going to lose him as a result. Bert and his wife Chris had been exceptionally efficient and were popular with all members, and after five years of trust, friendliness and prosperity, we would be very much loathe to lose them. In March, however, Bert tendered his notice, and on the 31<sup>st</sup> of the month, from ten applications, we chose Ted Jones of Sarn, but originally a local, to replace him, and of course, he moved into number 38, leaving us free to advertise for tenders.

In the same month, March 1963, the committee introduced a "chit" system, whereby each drink purchased over the counter earned the purchaser a chit, such chits to be saved and redeemed for a cash dividend at the year's end.

March also saw the introduction of lady members, paying two shillings and sixpence to join, with an annual subscription of one shilling. The ladies had long campaigned for "dancing" in the club, but the committee had resisted because the space required would considerably reduce the seating capacity, but in June, they relented, and from then on, dancing became a regular weekend feature.

Barry was the venue for the annual outing, children each receiving fifteen shillings and ladies five.

The committee were more than somewhat concerned over what seemed to be the excessive sums of money quoted on the tenders we had received for the new extension. Rhymney Brewery advised us not to accept any of them, their demands being extortionate. Time was passing and winter approaching, and eventually we accepted a tender from Hare Construction Company in the sum of £7539.14.10. That was in October 1963.

Christmas came, and with it the first payout of the "chit" scheme – sixpence in the pound. Some members collected as much as twelve to fifteen pounds while others, who had failed to patronise the club had nothing. OAPs were given three pounds each. All this at a cost to the club of, £1102.

The committee at Christmas 1963, consisted of Reg Davies – Chairman,

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George Hooper – Entertainment Secretary, Alf Skinner, Len Higgins, Mervyn Owen, Teddy Morris, Johnny Trigg, John Jeffries, Vic Jones, Trevor Owen, Dai Hughes “Cinema” Tom Williams “Patch”, Gordon Timbrell and Dai Lester.

In March of 1964, we accepted Rhymney Tank Beer on a trial basis. It proved not to be successful, and after about six months it was withdrawn. We bought a new bingo machine “Big Sam” for £110, and we stopped using the “saving stamp machine”. Instead, members wishing to save, had their savings books receipted in the usual manner. In September, Blaengarw RFC played the Welsh Guards, the club playing host to both teams afterwards, and by November despite slow progress, the club extension was completed.

A feature of the club, as with the neighbouring clubs, was the wealth of talent on tap – tenors, whistlers, yodellers, elocutionists and crooners, all eager to perform at weekend concerts, for years they had entertained us gratuitously, until the club began to reward them – a check, or “lucky dip” for a song, monologue, or whatever. Before the advent of the concert party and the professional artiste, they were a tremendous asset, providing as they did, entertainment – and at minimal cost, for their unstinting efforts on our behalf, I think their names, or at least the names of those I can remember, should be recorded – Freddy Peake and his brother Walter, Len Davies, Wil Owen, Llew Richards “Maesteg” and his brother Dai, Giles Howells, Dai Trigg, Tommy Huxtable, Tommy Toms, Jack Davies “Carn” Roy Williams “Crick” and his brother Billy, Danny Powell, Jim Martin, Jack Fudge, Dai Lester, Fred Watts, Alf Lewis, Wyndham Rees and his brother Wil, Harold James, Ken Tutt, Wil Welfare, Edgar Edwards, Bert Pembroke junior, Ray Patterson, Graham Parry, Winston Parry, Tommy Tennant, Jack Sutton, Wil Evans “Conker”, Eric Hawkins, Doug Scourfield, Ernie Clatworthy, Bill Bodenham and Mervyn Williams. Earlier still there were such as Dai Harris, Dai Curtis, Tom Bevan, Jim Woods and Wil Jones “Panto”, and no doubt, the reader will recall many others. Some of those mentioned would not have disgraced the professional stage.

Such a one was Tom Tennant, a favourite with members, male and female alike. He usually came into the club on Saturdays and Sundays about 8.30pm to 9pm, and as soon as his presence was known, the clamour would start – “we want Tom. We want Tom”, without delay, before ordering a drink; he would take to the stage and soon the hand clapping and to the toe tapping would begin. He bubbled over, and his vitality was catching. I well remember the night when Tom, who was short and plump, weighing about fourteen stones, gave his last performance – Saturday, September the 9<sup>th</sup>, 1964. After several songs, sweating profusely, which was not unusual, for he was a bundle of energy, he left the stage to rapturous applause. The evening over, almost as soon as arrived home, he was taken ill – to die within a matter of hours.

A young man in his early thirties, his passing was a sad and bitter loss. Apart from his ability to entertain, he was a thoroughly nice chap – highly respected and of cheerful disposition, with nothing but good to say of anyone, incapable of an unkind act.

Club extensions completed, we now had a bar in the newly opened skittle alley, a second TV room, and toilets upstairs. The bar counter in the concert room had been removed from one side to the other, thereby serving the new lounge as well. The game of skittles becoming increasingly popular feature, we joined the local skittles league, but otherwise we were back to square one, with an increased debt, owing both

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Rhymney and Truman – the clearing of which was to be our number one priority. Fortunately, and consequent upon the updating of our amenities, we soon began making a significant inroad into our obligation to the two breweries.

At Christmas, 1964, we gave members a dividend of one shilling in the pound on the chits they had collected, with OAPs receiving an additional three pounds. Together with various gifts given to staff and prizes in the free draw, the cost to the club was some two thousand pounds.

Throughout 1965 we made steady progress, but there were rumblings in the coal industry, with pits closing down at an alarming rate. The Carn was under constant threat of closure. If, and when it should ever happen, it would, apart from its impact on the locality, also have an adverse effect on the club, many of whose members worked there.

Once again it befalls me to report the death of one of our loyal members – Arthur Richards “Maesteg”, a popular figure in club life. He was, apart from being a committeeman, the local bookmaker. A friend since schooldays, he passed away during the miners holiday fortnight in 1965. At the time, I was on holiday in Southsea, with Fred Davies, Arthur had booked too, but illness had prevented him from joining us.

I should explain that in 1949 I was certified as suffering from pneumoconiosis, with a 40% disability. Twenty years later the disability had risen to 80%, and I feel that inevitably it has taken its toll, for I cannot even walk downstairs without getting short of breath. My condition was such that whilst on the holiday recently mentioned I first contemplated retirement from the office of Club Secretary. Physically and mentally I was tired. Eventually, my health took precedence, determining my decision, but not without regret – for fifteen years, I had enjoyed the whole-hearted support both of committee and members and also the financial rewards. Rewards, which brought some measure of luxury to an otherwise simple style of life. Most assuredly I am forever grateful for this, and for the opportunity to contribute towards the establishment of a modern and financially viable club. Although secretary's wages were small – three pounds per week, there were other perks, which helped compensate for this, but I hasten to add that they were all quite legitimate.

In November we balloted for a new secretary, Fred Davies, Jack Mabbutt and Mervyn Owen standing for the post. Fred and Mervyn re-balloted and Fred was elected by 110 votes to 57, but I have jumped forward a little in my story. Back in April of 1965, out steward Ted Jones terminated his employment to be replaced by Bob Pittard of Coytrahen. Bob and his wife Sheila immediately established a rapport with the members, auguring well for the future. When Fred Davies became secretary, a situation existed similar to the one when I was in office with my brother Bill as chairman for Fred's brother Reg also was chairman. Incidentally, Reg is my brother in law.

At the time of my resignation, the club owed Rhymney Brewery about £3000, a sum, which was rapidly being paid off. Once again the committee displayed shrewd and sound reasoning when they decided to forsake Rhymney in favour of Club Union, from whom we borrowed £3000 in order to repay our existing loan, and we went one hundred percent CPA, thereby earning a more than substantial bonus of some £2.15.0 on every barrel we sold. Annually this meant about £2000 and we were able both to repay the new loan within three years – by the end of May 1968, and to accumulate a comfortable bank balance of our own.

A breakdown of the bonus figures over the past three years follows:

1966/67	£1720
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1967/68	£1965
1968/69	£2170

During Fred Davies's term in office, the club really prospered, and for the first time since it opened in 1919, it became possible to build up our resources, and at the same time to provide adequate financial rewards for members. At Christmas 1967, and again in 1968, the price of our beer was reduced to sixpence per pint for some nine days, OAPs were given six pounds, ladies were given ten shillings, and a Christmas party was held, when each child received a box of chocolates worth ten shillings.

Back to 1967, however, when at 09:15 in the morning of the 21<sup>st</sup> October, a colliery spoil tip on the mountain-side above the school in May Road, Aberfan slipped, and an avalanche of muddy waste slid downward, silently and insidiously to engulf the little school below, sending one hundred and forty four souls, over one hundred of them children, into oblivion. The nation wept, the world was stunned. As one writer put it "the earth was wet with blood and tears".

This was the third time in fifty or so years that, the nation had wept. On the 23<sup>rd</sup> of October 1913, at Senghenydd, the Universal pit blew up, killing four hundred and forty men and boys – Britain's biggest ever colliery disaster, and in the 1914 – 1918 war, at the Battle of Mametz wood, on the Somme, in two days, two thousand young men, the flower of Wales, were killed or wounded.

In 1967, we lost another two old members, Edgar Evans and Llew Richards "Maesteg", brother to Arthur, and like him a close friend. In January of 1968, George Hawkin's our entertainment secretary passed on. A conscientious, sincere and hard working member, he will be sorely missed. I think he was about sixty-two years old.

Once more we were looking for a new steward, Bob Pittard having tendered his notice. We were loath to see him leave, for he and his wife Sheila were well liked. In June, however, we chose Jack Jones of Clydach, in the Rhondda, to replace him, Bob went on to become landlord of the Victoria Hotel in Commercial Street, Maesteg. Late in the year we were to lose two more of our members – Wil Lacey and W.A.M "Billy Boy" Parry, while at the WEXA, Andrew Russell died, subsequent to falling down the club stairs. In the same year, colour TV was introduced to the club, and for the sporting minded, Howard Winstone lost his World Featherweight title to Jose Legra, at Porthcawl.

In passing I should like to express my regret at not having earlier mentioned the demise of one of our more influential founder members, George Morris, long time chairman, the 22<sup>nd</sup> of May 1965.

Over the past few years, the Coal Industry had undergone a drastic change with the pressure of competition from oil. Deep inroads had been made into the coal market, and inevitably, less viable collieries, all over Britain, were being closed down, with thousands of miners being made redundant. The Welsh coalfield was particularly badly hit, and on October the 28<sup>th</sup> 1967, the Carn Colliery closed, leaving fifty to sixty of my fellow miners redundant. Twenty or so were kept on for salvage work, which terminated in April 1968. This traumatic closure programme gained momentum, the peak year being 1968, when fifty-five pits were closed. Ten years ago the industry's manpower was some six hundred thousand, today it is about three hundred thousand, and where there once were seven hundred pits there are now two hundred and ninety eight.

Back to the Carn, however, some of the men affected by the closure were transferred to Ocean Garw, and some to the Ffaldau. Together with five others I went to the Washery. Only a few suffered any real hardship for they each received a redundancy payment of between £450 and £750, and the Labour Government which

then was in office passed a Bill guaranteeing £30,000,000 per annum, to help alleviate hardship, by paying redundant miners nine tenths of their pay for three years from the date of their termination, for example – a miner who was earning £18.0.0 per week prior to his redundancy would have unemployment or sickness benefit made up to £16.4.0. Fortunately, the impact of pit closures did not have an adverse effect either on the community or the club.

In November of 1969, the miners received a pay rise of £1.7.6 per week, bringing the basic wage for bottom grade underground workers up to £16, and up to £15 for surface workers. With the continued rise in prices, however, wages still were not adequate.

For three and half years, our secretary – Fred Davies, had performed his various duties diligently and tactfully, but in June of 1969, unexpectedly, he resigned his office. In all, taking into account the time he had spent on the committee, he had served the club for some ten years. As I have earlier mentioned, we were out of debt, and with a considerable amount of money in the bank, well on the way to financial viability. In the ballot to replace Fred, Reg Davies (our chairman who had resigned so that he could stand) polled 107 votes and Mervyn Owen 53. Ted Jones, our one time steward, replaced Reg as chairman. The present steward having resigned, David Hogg, who had previously been landlord of the Squirrel Hotel in Pontycymmer, took his place. He did not last long, however, finishing in November of the same year, his place behind the bar being taken by one Bob Scott, who hailed originally from Durham. And so in 1969, we had had three stewards. It had been a traumatic year – happy, sad and eventful. Man landed on the moon, nearer to home the Investiture of the Prince of Wales took place at Caernarfon, when across the nation, cities, towns, villages and the smallest hamlets celebrated the occasion with street parties and the like, and of course, it was the club's golden jubilee year. On a sadder note, Jenkin "Siencyn" Edwards of Carn Houses, or to be correct Pwllcarn Terrace, passed away, as did two loyal, long term members – Jack Thomas "Bobby", who was in his seventies and Moelwyn Roberts. In his fifties, Moelwyn collapsed underground at Ocean Garw in October, and died before being brought to the surface. Austin Salmon also passed away, such was 1969.

In June of 1970, Bob Scott terminated his employment, a local boy Albert Hawkins taking over. We sincerely hoped that he would prove to be the answer to our problems, by serving us for many years to come. The community saw the loss of Jack Harding, in his seventies and Jim Thomas "Bobby". Two faithful and colourful club members also passed on – Stan Ward, who was seventy and Cliff Williams "Crick" aged sixty four, and on Christmas day we lost that grand old character Jack Fudge who died at the age of seventy five. The Fudges had the largest family membership in the club. There was Jack himself, his sons Winston, Arthur, Dilwyn, Ronnie and Eurios, his grandsons Michael, Lyndon, and Alan, and his two daughters Glenys and Hilda. Another big family were the Peakes – Fred the father, his sons Walter, Fred, Arthur, Ronnie and Windsor, and grandson Bryn.

In 1971, Reg Davies was the secretary, Ted Jones the chairman, Jack Toms the entertainment secretary and the committee consisted of Lyn Ward, Jack Mabbutt, Dai Lester, Dai Hughes "Peewee", Dai Davies "Dogs", Winston Fudge, John Morgan, Jock Mclean, Gwyn Rose and Billy Williams "Crick", none of the committee I first served with remained. Indeed only six are still alive.

Albert Hawkins, the steward, finished in June 1971, when a very young couple name Boyer, still in their early twenties, took over – to last but three months. They were replaced by a Mr Thomas from Porth.

February the 15<sup>th</sup> 1971, was a truly momentous date, heralding as it did the introduction of decimal coinage – a pound becoming one hundred instead of two hundred and forty pence, and one shilling becoming five instead of twelve pence etc. Once again, and on a much sadder note, I have to record the passing of several more of our older members – Bert Rowe at the age of seventy in January, Evan D “Ianto” Rees aged sixty five in March, Ernie Clatworthy also in March, Tommy Davies (top house Cross Street) aged sixty one, again in March, together with Fred Jones, Dai Harris, Dai Thomas and Arthur Lodwick. Ifor Cynddylan Williams, sometime lodge secretary at Ffaldau Colliery and George Rhodes, a former district councillor also died in 1971.

My health now has been progressively deteriorating, and the end of my narrative is impending. I finished work at the washery in March, having been declared redundant, and I find myself at the early age of sixty on the scrap heap, through ill health.

The club, I am pleased to say, is in a healthy position, financially the equal of any in the vicinity, for with some six or seven thousand pounds in our deposit account and no loans to repay, we can look forward to the future with confidence. What a contrast to the days of yesteryear – our formative days, when all was struggle.

Before I start to ramble, and on this happy note, I think I will conclude this the story of the First Fifty or so years of our club. There are many names beyond my recall which, perhaps, I should have mentioned, and I apologise for their omission, and there were unpleasant and distasteful happenings which are best left unsaid, but by and large, I have tried to be fair, and as accurate as possible. I hope that the reader will derive as much pleasure in reading this story as I have had in writing it. Little remains but for me to wish you all, and the club itself, the very best.

Yours, Arthur Davies

## " Parrot Swore at Police" " Blaengarw Club Raid Incident"

The following story comes from the South Wales Echo of 7th /4/1937.

" A parrot, which was alleged to have been kept in the bar of the Blaengarw Workingmen's Club was stated to have sympathised with the members of the club when Police raided the premises, and to have sworn at the Police. Following the raid, application was made to the Bridgend Magistrates today for the club to be struck off the register on the grounds that it was not conducive in good faith, that there was frequent drunkenness on the premises, and that persons that were not members were habitually admitted.

W.M. Thomas solicitor, of Bridgend prosecuted for the Police and Mr Forbes, barrister of London, instructed by L.J. Davies & Son of Pontyclun, defended. After dealing with various objections about the club, Mr Thomas stated that the management committee of the club appeared designed for one object only - the sale of beer. On Saturday the 30th of January the day of the raid there were alleged to be only 61 men on the premises, but none of them, according to the subscriptions book had paid their subscriptions for that quarter. The raid was carried out by Inspector David Richards of Ogmore Vale and 8 or 9 police officers who were posted at various points in the club. When Inspector Richards walked toward some of the men in the bar, they became offensive.

Mr Thomas added that a parrot kept hung in the bar seemed well trained in the atmosphere of the club. It did not conceal its disgust at the Police who raided the club, but expressed its sympathy openly with the members - for every time the police passed the cage, the parrot said "Bugger you".

Mr Thomas stated that the secretary Mr David Hughes was sent for, and he appeared to be very much under the influence of drink, when the warrant was read out to him, he asked "Who is this Inspector Richards? Where is he" after the Inspector told him, he said "Well lets have a pint before we start then".

Mr Thomas stated that the Police then took possession of the clubs books, which showed that the total bar takings for the year 1936 were £2,659.9.2p there were 56 gallons of beer on the premises at the time of the raid - and the books showed that the average consumption per member for the past 6 months was 17 pints per week, but that did not include the amount consumed by casual visitors.

Mr Thomas said that there were no newspapers on the premises but there were 370 books, all covered with dust, and with the exception of one book called "The Maid of Cefn Ydfa", there were no other books being read at the time".

The Club avoided being struck off and the police application failed, but the club was placed under close observation for 12 months. The parrot got away scot-free.

G Jarvis

This excerpt taken from Blaengarw Workingmens Club 2 The first fifty Years"  
by Arthur Davies