



*Cymdeithas Hanes Lleol  
Llandysul a'r Fro  
Local History Society*

Dear Members

I meant to have this ready to send out in January, to celebrate Calen Hen, but the month passed so fast for me, that here we are in February!

Following is a copy of the talk which Martin Griffiths, our Treasurer, gave at one of our monthly meetings. Martin gave an insight into the tradition of the Calen Hen Festival, its origins, its developments or otherwise over the years, and its status today.

I've then added some transcriptions from our local newspapers on the same subject.

The committee all hope that we can hold a meeting in the spring, and start to get back to near "normal" later this year. In the meantime, keep safe.

Jane  
Chairman

**Calan Hen Festival  
Llandysul Parish Church**

The date to consider is the 12<sup>th</sup> January. Why the 12<sup>th</sup> we may ask?

In 1978, the Venerable Islwyn John, Vicar of the Parish of Llandysul at that time, along with Mr. I.T. Hughes (a teacher at one time at Llandysul Grammar School), decided to write a booklet entitled "St Tysul's Church Llandysul – A Short History and Guide." Its contents were based primarily on an article written originally by Mr. Hughes for "*Ceredigion*," the Journal of the Cardiganshire Antiquarian Society in 1978. The booklet was then sold in aid of the Church Restoration Fund at that time.

Contained in the booklet is a considerable amount of detail about the background of the church, its interior and exterior, the pipe organ, and indeed, the Calan Hen Festival.

In the booklet, it states, "Attached to this church is an interesting custom, based on the change of Calendar from the Julian system (Old Style) to the Gregorian System (New Style), made in September 1752, when eleven days, (3 to 13 inclusive), were omitted, and Wednesday, 2<sup>nd</sup> September, was immediately followed by Thursday, 14<sup>th</sup> September.

On the old New Year's Day, now 12<sup>th</sup> January, it was the custom of farmers to give a sumptuous repast to their harvest workers as an honorarium for their work. It was held early in the morning, but by nine o'clock (in the morning might I add), most of the men were under the influence. The rest of the day was spent kicking the "black ball". The kick off was near Cwmeinion, roughly halfway between Llanwenog Church, the porch of which was one goal, and Llandysul Church, the porch of which was the other. The gentle cloak of night eventually covered the ugliness and bitterness thereof.

In 1833 the incumbent, the Reverend James, established the festival in another sense. He gathered together the Sunday Schools of the churches within a radius of about eight miles and got them to meet at Llandysul Church, for each to answer catechisms, sing anthems, and collectively recite the Scriptures. This way of keeping "Calan Hen" did much to improve the Scriptural knowledge and musical ability of the neighbourhood.

In 1933, all the Sunday Schools connected with "Calan Hen" contributed towards the erection of the lych-gate of this parish church, in memory of the Reverend Enoch James, founder of the Festival, and to commemorate the centenary of its establishment.

Enoch James was born in 1792 and remained as Vicar of the Parish of Llandysul and of Llanfihangel-ar-Arth Church until his death in 1849.

Interestingly, the "black ball" was made of a rounded piece of wood which was then boiled in wax – a lethal weapon as you can imagine. This, combined with people's high spirits, moreso as the day developed, led to many people being injured and indeed getting killed as they played the game.

Initially, Enoch James's efforts were met with considerable opposition by some, who in turn were determined to continue to celebrate "Calan Hen" in its original guise. The book, "Hanes Plwyf Llandysul" refers to an incident when the ball was, (on one occasion), as a mark of disrespect for the festival in its revised guise, kicked in to the church through one door and out through the other, but this level of opposition declined gradually as the years went by, with the "Calan Hen" continuing in its present form since that time.

Enoch James was considered to be one of the best preachers of his time. He married the daughter of the Reverend Morris Evans, Vicar of Llangeler, and they had eight children, four boys and four girls, all his four sons becoming vicars.

Let's now take a look at "Calan Hen" in its present form, being largely unchanged since 1833. In total, some fifteen churches took part. These were the churches in Llandysul and surrounding areas, namely (not in any particular order): Llandysul, Tregroes, Pont-sian, Capel Dewi, Llanllwni, Llanfihangel-ar-Arth, Pencader, Penboyr and St. Barnabas Churches in Drefach Felindre, Llangeler, Capel Mair Church in Bancyffordd, Llanpumsaint, St. James' Church in Rhos Saron, Llanwenog, Capel Cynon and Talgarreg. More lately, St. James' Church, Llanwenog, Capel Cynon, Talgarreg and Llanpumsaint Churches have not participated.

"Calan Hen" used to be celebrated on the 12<sup>th</sup> January, come what may, with children even being given time off school to attend with their local church!! In latter years, it is now celebrated on the Saturday nearest to the 12<sup>th</sup> January.

Evan James' aim, in changing the format of the festival, was to obviously make it a safer event, but also to have a more religious focus. The current format for the day nowadays is that the festival commences with a short service of prayer/worship which starts at 10.00 a.m. and lasts for up to half an hour. Thereafter, each church participating will, in turn, be invited up to the chancel of the church and will recite a selected passage from the Bible. In

earlier days, ALL churches had a number of children attending their Sunday School. If this was the case, the children of the Sunday School of that church would recite their chosen passage from the Bible first. A visiting member of the Clergy would then question the children about that passage. This would go on for some ten minutes or so. It would then be the turn of the adults of that particular church to recite their selected piece of Scripture and be questioned about it thereafter by the same member of the Clergy. (some churches would *chant* their selected piece). This again would last for some ten minutes. To conclude their session, that church would then sing an anthem.

In researching about Calan Hen, I recently found this piece from the Carmarthen Journal, dated 16<sup>th</sup> January, 1948, noting the titles of all the anthems sung on the day as well as the names of the conductor for each church:

*“Anthems were rendered as follows:*

*St. David – “Dyma y Dydd” (Conductor: Mr. Willie Jenkins)*

*St. John-“Ystyria Wrth Fy Ngweddi” (Conductor: Mr. Hywel Davies)*

*St. Ffraid – “O Dduw, Rho I’m Dy Hedd” (Conductor: Mr. David Thomas, Cwmhyar)*

*Parish Church – “Comes at Times a Stillness” (Conductor: Mr. Alun Howells)*

*Llanfihangel-ar-Arth – “Awn I Dŷ yr Arglwydd (Conductor: Mr. J.C. Jones, Derwydd)*

*Pencader – “Tŷ Fy Nhad (Conductor: Mrs. Evans, Colledge)*

*Penboyr – “Enaid Cu, Mae Dyfroedd Oerion” (Conductor: Mr. Evan Davies, Llaingof)*

*St. Barnabas – “Llusern y Cristion” (Conductor: Mr. William Davies, Milford House)*

*Llangeler Parish Church – “A Oes Canu yn y Nefoedd?” (Conductor: Mr. D. Jones Davies, Vicar)*

*Llanpumsaint – “O Worship the King” (Conductor: Mrs. Decima Lewis)*

*Cynwyl Elfed – “Ar Lan Iorddonen Ddofn” (Conductor: Mr. J. Thomas, Nantygelli).*

After they had sung their anthem, they would leave the chancel to sit in the congregation (or leave the church), and the next church in the order for the day would then be invited up to the chancel.

Each church’s “session” would last for half an hour, with the day’s events coming to an end at around 5.00 p.m. (People have the freedom to come and go throughout the day as they wish).

A different member of clergy would take on the role of “question master” for each church. Someone who was good in this role would be sure to bring in a good deal of humour to the discussion, and, as can often be the case with children, some quite unexpected responses. I can recall on one occasion, many years ago, one of the Clergy, well into a discussion with a group of children, (I think it was from Pontsian Sunday School), asking them a question something like, “What did people live on during the time of the Bible?” To which one child promptly replied, “Social Security!!” On another occasion, with a group of adults came the question, “Where do you think Heaven is? / Ble ydych chi’n meddwl mae’r Nefoedd?” The response of one person (who incidentally was a Vicar’s wife), was, “Up, beyond the clouds.” To which the person leading the discussion responded, “There’s nothing beyond the clouds, only more clouds/Does dim byd tu draw i’r cymylau ond rhagor o gymylau!” The Vicar’s wife then replied, “How do you know?/Sut y’ch chi’n gwybod?” To which she was given the answer, “I’ve been there/Rwy’ wedi bod ‘na!”

As time has gone on, fewer churches now have their own Sunday Schools. Out of the eleven churches which still participate, it is only about four or five which have their own Sunday School.

It is also right to say that numbers of adults in the congregations of the churches have also dwindled over the years, with many churches relying more heavily each year on the support of people who are not members of their church to help them out on the day. Indeed, some people, as we have done ourselves in the past, help a number of churches, especially with the singing.

A further effect of the dwindling numbers is each church's choice of what to sing on the day. Over recent years, we have seen a distinct shift away from singing an anthem to singing just a hymn.

In the past, churches would prepare thoroughly, and well in advance for "Calan Hen" day, even commencing their rehearsals some weeks before Christmas. In doing so, they were well-prepared if the weather took a turn for the worse in the middle of Winter, and even learnt their selected part of the Scripture off by heart. None of this today might I add!!

Coupled with dwindling numbers, I do feel some evidence of apathy, with churches leaving it until the last minute before preparing, having perhaps just the one rehearsal on the Sunday before the event on the following Saturday, and singing a simple hymn which they are well used to singing every Sunday.

Every year at around October or November, a meeting is held to discuss the next year's "Calan Hen" event. All churches are usually represented at the meeting and are quite enthusiastic about participating. However, it is becoming increasingly more difficult, but the status-quo remains, and rightly so. At this meeting, the plan for the day is drawn up, with a specific time given to each church. The visiting member of Clergy is also nominated for each church and the passages of Scripture also selected. Each year, for the adults, all selected passages focus on one book from the Bible, for example, Genesis, Acts of the Apostles, Romans, Luke, etc. For the children, passages would be selected from a children's Bible, and would focus on particular stories or events, for example, Daniel, Ruth, Christmas, etc...

During the day, hymns would occasionally be sung by the congregation, These would be offertory hymns, with any money collected used to defray costs of holding the festival. I have brought some copies of the booklet containing hymns sung on the day, for you to see.

Many years ago, Calan Hen day was regarded as one of the highlights for businesses in the village of Llandysul. So different from nowadays, people would come to Calan Hen and the village for the day. Eating places in the village would be extremely busy throughout the day and local shops, e.g. Siop y Jones (the drapers' siop) would ensure that this day was the first day of their annual sale!! Local church members would also arrange for "cawl" to be served at the Church Hall.

In the earlier days of the last century, it appeared that local farmers would bring their produce and even some crops to the village on this day to sell on the streets!

It has been said that sales in local shops on this day were better than on any other day throughout the year!

It has to be said that this day was a social occasion for many as well as attending Calan Hen, and some people would see each other only on this day every year.

The day's proceedings, up until the 1960's would end with a drama being performed in the local village hall, the Tysul Hall, either by local people or by drama societies slightly further afield. This tradition has long ended.

On a lighter note, I must refer to one “one-off” event which occurred on this day some sixty years ago. It had become customary for everyone attending to have their photograph taken (collectively) on the suspension bridge located just outside the boundary wall of the church every year. Those of you who are familiar with Llandysul and the location of the church, will know that the River Teifi (being the boundary between Ceredigion on the one side and Carmarthenshire on the other) flows just past the church. On this particular year, things did not work out quite as anticipated!! Needless to say, that with the passage of time, the bridge had weakened, but was helped on its journey into the river with the weight of as many people as could stand on it!!

In 1948, the Calan Hen festival celebrated its 115<sup>th</sup> anniversary. A report in the Carmarthen Journal read:

*“Llandysul Parish Church was thronged throughout Monday last for the 115<sup>th</sup> festival of Calan Hen. Thirteen churches took part, and the Rev. T.R. Evans, Vicar of Llandysul, presided. The manner in which the various Sunday Schools recited the “pwnc” and rendered anthems proved that the fervour that has marked this grand old festival along the years, is as evident as ever.”*

A similar occasion again to mark the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1983, a report in the Western Mail read,

*“This year is the 150<sup>th</sup> Calan Hen Festival, and to mark the event, the Bishop of St. David’s, the Right Reverend George Noakes, is holding a special thanksgiving service in the church.”*

As a climax to this particular celebration, all churches united at the end of the day to sing the great Welsh anthem, “Teyrnasoedd y Ddaear,” under the leadership of Reverend Canon Aled Williams, who, until his retirement was Vicar at Lampeter and prior to that at Llanddewi Brefi.

The future? So many questions to ask and consider, this one being first and foremost:

*How many of the churches which participate in the Calan Hen festival will remain open?*

“Calan Hen” will celebrate its 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary in just fifteen years’ time. What will membership numbers in each of these churches be at that time?

It is incumbent upon us to ensure that the Calan Hen festival continues, but for how long in its current form remains to be seen. If you have never experienced a taste of the Calan Hen festival, please come along to Llandysul on the Saturday nearest to the 12<sup>th</sup> of January and see for yourself. However, unfortunately, on this day, we can no longer offer the village attractions, such as the annual sales in local shops that used to be so prominent in years gone by, as those shops have now all closed!!

**Cambrian News and Merionethshire Standard**

**17 January 1879**

**SUNDAY SCHOOL GATHERING**

The annual Sunday-school gathering of Calen Hen, was held on Monday, January 13. Divine services commenced at 10.30 a.m. The Rev. W. Powell, Bangor Tivy, intoned the service. Miss Agnes Jenkins presided at the harmonium. The spacious building, which had been elaborately and tastefully decorated was overcrowded.

At the conclusion the Rev. J. Jones, Llanfihangel-ar-Arth delivered an appropriate address. Provisions were provided at different houses in the town for the schools by their respective pastors. Mrs. Jenkins, with her usual liberality, kindly invited all the members of the Llandyssul Choir to a substantial dinner at the vicarage.

**The Aberystwith Observer**

**19 January 1884**

**LLANDYSSUL**

**"CALAN HEN"**

The annual meeting of the Church Sunday schools of this district took place at Llandyssul last Saturday. It is estimated that some 1,500 persons attended, who comprised eleven schools. The litany was ably intoned by the vicar of Llangeler, after which the various schools recited their portions of the Holy Scriptures, in which they were catechised. The singing throughout was very good, and testified that much care and labour had been bestowed by all. It was a decided success.

**South Wales Daily News**

**13 January 1899**

**LLANDYSSUL CALAN HEN FESTIVAL**

The above choral and recitative festival, which has been held for a period extending over 66 years, was held this year at the Parish Church, Llandyssul when the following Sunday schools of the surrounding parish churches took part:-

Pencader, Llanfihangel-ar-Arth, Penrhys, St. Barnabus, St. David's, St. John's, St. Ffraid, Llanpumpaint, Bangor, Llandyssul, Capel Maur, Llangeler.

A short service was held, when the Rev. W.G. Jenkins, vicar, officiated. Amongst those present we notice the following gentlemen:-

Revs. W.G. Jenkins, vicar; T.H. Davies, curate; H.J. Stewart, curate; T. Jones, Penbryn; Professor R. Williams, M.A., Lampeter; J. Lloyd, Llanpumpsaint; J. Williams, Llangeler; E. Evans, Llanfihangel-gener-glyn; W. Powell, Newcastle Emlyn.

The service being over the various Sunday schools went through their allotted tasks in reciting a portion of the Scriptures and singing an anthem. The singing of "Bryn Calfaria" and a benediction by Rev. W. Powell, Newcastle Emlyn, terminated the festival.

In the evening a grand vocal, instrumental, and dramatic concert was held at the Porth Hotel Assembly Rooms when the following artistes took part:-

Suprano, Miss Jeannie Jones, Newcastle Emlyn;

Contralto, Miss M. Close, Llandyssul;

Tenor, Mr. W.H. Protheroe, Llanelly;

Bass, Mr. J.B. Morse, Llanelly;

Comique, Mr D.J. Morris, of the Gaiety Theatre, London, and Mr. W.J. Evans.

The Newcastle Emlyn Amateur Dramatic Company produced the comedy entitled "Winning a Wife", and a side-splitting farce, "My Jealous Husband."

## **Welsh Gazette and West Wales Advertiser**

**8 January 1903**

### **LLANDYSSUL**

#### **PETTY SESSIONS**

The monthly Petty Sessions were held on Wednesday, December 31st, before Mr. Charles Lloyd (in the chair), Captain Stewart, Mr. D.J. Lloyd, and the Rev. Thos. Thomas.

#### **EXTENSION**

Mr. A.E. Smith, Porth Hotel, was granted an hour's extension on the 15th January, "Calan Hen" day.

## **Welsh Gazette and West Wales Advertiser**

**21 January 1904**

### **CALAN HEN**

The annual choras and recitation festival in connection with the Sunday Schools of the churches of Llandyssul and adjoining parishes was held at the Parish Church, Llandyssul, on Tuesday, the 12<sup>th</sup> inst. Though the weather was rather unfavourable, yet almost the whole of the members of each school put in an appearance, and there was a muster of about a thousand people at the church that day. Amongst the clergy present were the Vicar (Rev. J.R. Jones), the curate (Rev. D Jones), Revs. G.P. Gabriel, St. David's Cathedral; H. Jones, Llandyfriog; T. Jones, Penboyr; Hugh Evans, St. David's; H. Jones, Pencader; E.O Jones, Llangunllo; J. Hughes, Llanfihangel-ar-arth; W. Williams, Llangeler; J. Lloyd, Llampumpsiant; D.E. Hughess, Llangeler; S.B. Williams, Llanelly; D.W. Thomas, Carmarthen; J.A. Morgan, Llanelly; D. Jones, Bangor.

The 10.30 service was conducted by the Vicar, and consisted of the singing of the Venite (Psalm xcvi.), reciting the creed offering up of prayers, and the sinning of that well-known hymn, "O tyred Arglwydd mawr, etc.," to the tune of "Malvern", then the various schools went through their work in the following order:

St. David's – Catechiser, Rev. G.P. Gabriel, St. David's Cathedral. Anthem, "Goruchafiaeth y Cristion." (T.G. Richards), conductor, Mr. T. Jenkins, Cilgraig.

St. Ffraid's – catechiser, Rev. D.E. Hughes, Llangeler; anthem, "Yr Arglwydd yw fy Mugail" (W.T. Samuel), conductor, Mr. D. Thomas, Cymbyar.

St. John's – Catechiser, Rev. E.O. Jones, Llangynllo; anthem, "hosanna yn y goruchaf" (D.W. Lewis), conductor, Mr. D. Jones, Rhydowen.

Penboyr – Catechiser, Rev. E.O. Jones, Llangunnlow; anthem "O prawf a gwell" (Sir John Goss), conductor Mr. J. Davies, Brynteg, Velindre.

St. Barnabus – Catechiser, Ref. Hugh Evans, St. David's; anthem, "Halleluiahs chorus" (Handel), conductor Mr. D. Jenkins, schoolmaster.

Llanpumpsiant – Catechiser, Rev. T. Jones, Penboyr; anthem, "Dy holl weithredoedd, O Arglwydd" (D. Parry), Conductor, Mr. Phil. Thomas, Neuadd.

Pencader – Catechiser, Rev. H. Jones, Llandyfriog; anthem, "Cenwch I'r Arglwydd" (T.B. Richards), conductor, Mr. R. Evans, Farmer's Arms.

St. James – Catechiser, Rev. H. Jones, Pencader; anthem, "Hosanna I Fab Dafydd" (Scourfield), conductor, Mr. Samuel Jones, Lamb Inn.

Capel Mair – Catechiser, Rev. J.T. Hughes, Llanfihangel-ar-arth; anthem; "Par I mi wybod dy ffydd" (D. Harries), conductor, Mr. D. Jones, Aelybryn.

Llangeler – Catechiser, Rev. J. Lloyd, Llanpumpsaint; anthem, "Cenwch I'r Arglwydd" (D. Thomas), conductor, Mr. D. Jones, Llangeler.

Llandyssul – Catechiser, Rev. W. Williams, Llangeler; anthem, "The grace of God that bringeth Salvation" (J. Barnley), conductor, Mr. T.S.F. Morgan, National School.

The proceedings were closed with the sinning of that beautiful hymn "Ser y nos yn lluaws mawr," etc. to the tune "Aberystwyth", after which the Benediction was given by the Vicar, Miss Muriel Williams, A.L.C.M., The Tonn, presided at the organ.

**Welsh Gazette and West Wales Advertiser**

**26 December 1907**

**CALEN HEN**

Fuller particulars of the old-established festival are made public, in which it is seen that the thirty fourth annual entertainment will be held at the National School on Monday evening, January 13<sup>th</sup>. There will be three parts to the entertainment, the first being a laughable dialogue entitled "Is Marriage a Failure?", the second part is composed of vocal and instrumental music, in which Mr T. Ainsleigh Jones will take the part of comedian while a farce "The Bobbies' Courtship" forms part three. The proceeds will be devoted towards the Parish Churchyard Extension Fund.

**Carmarthen Journal and South Wales Weekly Advertiser**

**22 January 1915**

**CALAN HEN FESTIVAL**

"Calan Hen Festival", one of the oldest religious festivals in Wales, was held last week at Llandyssul. It dates back several centuries, being founded as a counter-attraction to the vices which accompanied various forms of sport during Christmastide and the New Year. It is supported by 13 Sunday Schools of the Established Church in the Llandyssul district, and it is the chief event of the year on their programme. It takes the form of a "Gymanfa Pwnc" held by Nonconformists, with the exception that singing gets greater prominence than at the latter. The attendance this year was again very large. Among the officiating clergy were: Preb. Lloyd, Llanpumpsaint; Revs. J.T. Hughes, Llanfihangel-ar-Arth; E.O. Jones, M.A., Llangynllo; W.J. Evans, Llanfair-Orllwyn; D. Jenkins, Penboyr; and H. Jones, B.D., Llaneler.

The arrangements were in the hands of the Rev. E.D. Henry. In the evening an organ recital was given by Mr. Louis Torr, Swansea.

**Carmarthen Journal & South Wales Weekly Advertiser**

**3 October 1919**

**LLANDYSSUL**

A meeting was held at the National School on Monday last, when representatives of the various Church Sunday Schools which usually attend the Calen Hen Annual Festival for the purpose of making arrangements for the 1920 meetings. The portions of Scripture selected this year are from St. John, 13th chapter onward.

---

There are some photos of Calan Hen taken in 1961, in the Geoff Charles Collection on the National Library of Wales website: <http://hdl.handle.net/10107/1482905>