

The 'Glorious' Hiring Fairs in Penybont / Y Ffeiriau Hurio 'Gogoneddus' ym Mhen-y-bont

By Derek Turner

Welsh Translation by / Cyfieithiad gan Dai Hawkins

Standing by the War Memorial you might imagine, as well as the elephants that arrived by train, 10,000 people and 100 stalls arranged in a 'higgledy piggledy' fashion all around you and down to the bridge. There might be floating candy floss, swing boats, and people selling saucepans, as well as the inevitable drunk staggering past the Temperance Tent. Bibles were being dispensed so fast that the Quakers were running backwards and forwards to the Pales to get more supplies; and this alongside what was described as 'a cesspool of vices or a centre of immorality from which the country all around is demoralised'.

The Hiring Fairs, or Mop Fairs, were established to facilitate the hiring of labour to work on the farms and in the houses of the gentry. People came in their work uniforms and paraded in the hope of getting a shilling as a promise of a wage by one of the farmers. There is a suggestion that the Fairs may have started in Cefnlllys when it obtained a market charter in 1297 from the Marcher Lords. There is some evidence that the Fairs then moved to Rhyd y Clefion (the ford of the injured), which is the old name for the old hamlet of Penybont situated primarily on the far side of the Bridge. By 1730 when Edward Price established his shop in Penybont there were already references to the Fairs at Penybont. They continued on

Wrth sefyll ger y Gofeb Ryfel, gellir dychmygu yr eliffantod a ddaeth gyda'r trên. 10,000 o bobl a 100 o stondinau wedi'u trefnu mewn ffordd blith draphlith o'ch cwmpas chi ac i lawr at yr afon. Byddai fflos candi, cychod siglo, a phobl yn gwerthu sosbenni, ynghyd ag ambell i feddwyn bondigrybwyll yn simsanu heibio i'r Babell Ddirwest. Roedd Beiblau yn cael eu dosbarthu mor glau fel bu rhaid i'r Crynwyr redeg yn ôl ac ymlaen i'r Pales i mofyn mwy o gyflenwadau; a hyn oll wrth ochr peth a ddisgrifiwyd fel, 'carthbwl o lygredigaeth neu ganolfan anfoesoldeb sy'n llygru'r holl wlad o amgylch. Sefydlwyd y Ffeiriau Hurio, neu Ffeiriau Mop er hwyluso huro llafurwyr i weithio ar ffermydd a thai'r byddigions. Daeth pobl yn eu dillad gwaith, a rhodio gan obeithio cael swllt yn ernes o gyflog gan un o'r ffermwyr. Mae awgrym i'r Ffeiriau gychwyn yng Nghefn-llys pan gafodd siarter farchnad gan Arglwyddi'r Mers. Mae peth dystiolaeth i'r Ffeiriau symud wedyn i Rhyd y Clefion (sef rhyd y gwahanglwyf fusion) hen enw am y pentrefyn wedi'i leoly yn bennaf ochr draw'r bont. Erbyn 1730, pan sefydlodd Edward Price ei siop ym Mhen-y-bont, bu eisoes gyfeiriadau at y ffeoriau ym Mhen-y-bont. Aethai yn eu blaen tan tua 1950. Er taw hurio llafur oedd y rheswm am y ffeiriau. a ddigwyddai dair gwaith y flwyddyn ar 13^{eg} o fis Mai, 11^{eg} o fis Medi a 26^{ain} o

until around 1970. Though hiring of labour was the reason for the Fairs, that occurred 3 times a year on 13th May, 11th September and 26th October, but 90% of what went on was just fun. Roy Palmer on 1857 said: *“The old feasts on Saint’s Days are now done away with, and I hope the pleasure fairs will soon follow in their wake. Markets are useful, but pleasure fairs benefit none but those whose work it is to pander to the vices and crimes of their fellow creatures.”*

Those people who could still remember the fairs talked about it being the highlight of their year, getting a new dress, and even walking the four miles from Cefnlllys to attend. There were fortune tellers, coconut shies, hobby horses, many stalls selling all manner of things, a tent with a dwarf on view, boxing booths, china stalls, tinkers, shooting galleries, swings, and a stall selling rock. Confetti Battles was a particular memory of Kate Jones from Cilmanowydd. In her teens the special joy of this special day, however, was ‘looking for the boys’.

Extracted from Geraint Hughes’s Book – Penybont a Village History and from his talk to Penybont and District History Group, see:

<https://penybontlhgnotes.wordpress.com/2014/05/06/penybont-and-district-local-history-group-meeting-at-thomas-shop-13th-may-2013-rev-geraint-hughes-the-fairs-and-market-at-penybont/>

fis Hydref, hwyl a sbri oedd 99% o’r digwyddiad.

Ym 1857, ebe Roy Palmer, “Mae’r hen wyliau ar ddiwrnodau Nawddsant wedi’u chwalu a gobeitho bydd y ffeiriau pleser yn dilyn yn eu hôl yn fuan. Mae marchnadoedd yn llesol, ond dyw ffeiriau pleser ddim yn elwa neb ond y rhai sy’n gweithio i ddyhuddo at ddrygweithiau a throseddau eu cyd-greaduriaid.” Roedd y rhai oedd yn dal i gofio’r ffeiriau yn sôn amdanyn nhw fel uchafbwynt eu blwyddyn, cael ffrog newydd, a hyd yn oed cerdded y bedair milltir i Ben-y-bont i’w mynychu. Bu pobl dweud ffortiwn, stondinau taro coconyts, ceffylau pren, llawer o stondinau yn gwerthu pob math o bethau, pabell gyda chorrach i syllu arno, pebyll paffio, stondinau tsieina, galeriau saethu, siglenni, a stondyn yn gwerthu roc. Roedd Kate Jones o Gilmanowydd yn cofio’n arbennig Brwydrau Confetti. Yn ei harddegau, ‘chwilio’r bechgyn’ fu llawenydd arbennig y diwrnod arbennig hwn.

Wedi’i ddethol o lyfr Geraint Hughes’ – *Penybont a Village History* ac o’i draethiad at Grŵp Hanes Pen-y-bont a’i Gyffiiniau, gweler: <https://penybontlhgnotes.wordpress.com/2014/05/06/penybont-and-district-local-history-group-meeting-at-thomas-shop-13th-may-2013-rev-geraint-hughes-the-fairs-and-market-at-penybont/>