A visit to old Nant Gwrtheyrn

Last updated: 02 April 2009

Dic Trevor (Richard T) Jones was born in Caernarfon and lived in various parts of North Wales before emigrating to Canada in the 1940s. He shares his recollection of visiting Nant Gwrtheyrn, now a Welsh language centre, back in the 1920s when it was still a busy little quarry village.

Dic died in Canada, aged 98, in March 2009.

"It was in the summer of 1928 when I was in my 18th year. I worked at Jays furniture shop in Castle Square, Caernarfon. Our travelling salesman had sold a van full of furniture to the new manager of the granite quarry (Nant Gwrtheyrn). He and his family were moving into the large house, called The Manor (pictured below), which was just below the village, overlooking the sea.

We loaded the van the evening before delivery day so that we could leave early. We had a crew of seven - John Flynn, John Pritchard, brother of the salesman Elias Pritchard, John Griffith, John Angel, John Keyes, Dick Edwards and me.

We left Castle Square at 6.30am. It was a beautiful day. As we got closer to Yr Eifl we saw that the three peaks were in white cloud. We left the main road at Llanalhaearn, turned up to Llithfaen where we made a right turn up the mountain to the car park above the Nant. We were now just above the clouds - what a sight - billowing clouds as far as the eye could see.

We started unloading. My first load was a spring mattress and some congoleum square lashed to it. It was very tricky walking down the road, as the road had worn in the middle, to form a shape like a 'V'. When I got to the house, with the help of one of the boys, I had to unwrap the congoleum and lay it, then fix the spring mattress together. We had to put everything together.

My second load was a five drawer chest which I had lashed with webbing, and carried down on my back. We each made four trips up and down the hill. We got back to Caernarfon at 7pm very tired.

During the eight years I worked for Jays I had occasion to visit the Nant five times. During one visit news came into the
village that a young girl, who was the daughter of a Mrs Owen, who was also a customer of Jays, had been killed in a motorcycle accident at Llanystumdwy.

I am, at 93, the sole survivor of the gang who visited the Nant that day. My last visit to the Nant, also known as Vortigan's Valley, was in 1985 with a friend, Eluned Vaughan. I was 75, she was 70. There was a Welsh learning class in progress on one of the lawns of a cottage. We stopped and had a chat with the teacher, who was a professor from the University of Wales, Aberystwyth. I lived in Aberystwyth for two years in the 1940s myself."

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**your comments**

**Michael Wood, Birmingham UK**
I was told that when I was born in the Nant, it was the first time that the midwife had come down in a jeep. The story ended up the local newspaper.  
Tue Apr 21 15:20:21 2009

**Michael Wood**
I was born in the Nant on in 1949. My father worked for a while at the quarry, before moving to another part of Wales, then we moved back to Birmingham in 1960. I have visited the Nant many times with my family and I wish it had been restored to how it was, so many memories.  
Mon Apr 20 15:31:54 2009

**Meinir Jones, Leicester.**
Nant Gwyrtheyrn will always be a very special place to me, as that's where my mother and her brother and sisters were brought up. My grandfather and grandma lived and farmed in Ty Uchaf. I have been fortunate enough to read Eileen Webb's book this village was ours and in there was many an interesting account of my family's life. My grandfather was known as Gwilym Ty Uchaf. Unfortunately my grandfather died, before I was born and my mum died in Dec 1977 but, my grandmother lived to be 90 and she sadly passed away in November 1995. My aunt Hannah however, is still living in Llithfaen and my Uncle Bobby lives in Menai Bridge, but unfortunately my auntie Doris died in March 2006 very suddenly.  
Fri Oct 12 09:18:42 2007

**David Piper from Ontario Canada**
I lived in Nant Gwertheyrn from 1948 to late 1952, (then national service), so I had the pleasure of knowing the Earp family, who were missed very much when they moved to Burton on Trent. I also knew the Woods and remember Keith being born. I worked at Croft Quarry, Caernant, as helper to carpenter Richard Roberts. We built and repaired many of those wagons that traversed the quarry banks and down the incline to the seashore. Richard became my brother in law. Sionad Roberts is my great niece. I am very proud of my Welsh connection and when I visit Nant it's just like coming home.  
Thu Jul 5 09:44:06 2007

**Alan Piper Newcastle on Tyne.**
I was very fortunate to spend my early childhood in Nant Gwrtheyrn. This beautiful valley holds so many wonderful memories for me and my family. There is something magical about the place, it's like a magnet that draws so many people back to visit its unique location. We are planning to hold a family reunion in Nant next year so anyone who lived there between 1948 to 1953 and remembers the Piper family would be most welcome.

Thu May 31 08:56:51 2007

Gareth Parry from Penmaenmawr

I was brought up in Pwllheli and visited the then deserted village of Nant Gwrtheyrn with my parents in 1971. The place held an eerie fascination for me. I never thought I would ever meet anyone who had actually lived there. I had heard that my maternal grandfather had worked there briefly in the late 1930s and also that my great-grandfather on my father’s side lived there for a while in the old barracks. One day in 1989, my next-door neighbour lent me a book, 'This Valley was Ours' by Eileen M. Webb. I didn't read it immediately and was unaware of its subject matter. When I did settle down with it, I was absolutely amazed that it was a fully-blown real-life account of one of the former residents. I couldn't put the book down. When I came to the end, I was so enthralled by the whole story I had an insatiable urge to contact the author immediately to tell her how much I'd enjoyed her book. Who was Eileen Webb who had lived so close to my home town? Through contacts I managed to obtain her telephone number and rang her at her home in Hastings. We engaged in a most interesting conversation for over an hour. It was to be the beginning of a long and wonderful friendship. Eileen and her family visited me at my home in 1991 (after many phone chats) and I became a friend of the family. I am godfather to her younger grand-daughter and baptised her myself (I am an Anglican priest). I have since visited the home of the ‘famous author’ (as I always called her) many times and had many profound conversations with Eileen. Tragically, Eileen died in 2005. I had the privilege of conducting her funeral service at a Baptist Church in Hastings. I am still in close touch with her family. I now work as a teacher and school chaplain in Wolverhampton.

Fri Feb 2 09:45:14 2007

Trevor Evans U.S. Ohio

Reading about the Nant is very interesting to me as I have many connections to the area. My mothers family was from Llithfaen, her maiden name was Elizabeth Ann Griffiths , her father John Roberts Griffiths. One brother was Captain Richard Griffiths who built many homes in Llithfaen, he has a very interesting history.

Mon Nov 27 10:49:44 2006

Keith Wood from X Hands

The Nant holds a very special place in my life because I was born there in the early 1950s. The above story holds true with what I heard from my parents of when my dad had to carry coal up the Nant and down the other side on a bike and how difficult life was there because of its barren location. Although not of welsh origins I have always felt Wales to be my home and at last have now moved back to
Wales (home at last).
Tue May 10 19:02:50 2005

David Tomlinson from Burton on Trent
My mother Mary Earp lived in the Nant with her parents George and Emma, her brothers Trevor & and Ken and her sisters Betty [mum's twin] and Barbara in the 30s/40s. She often speaks of a time during the war when her brothers were distracted one night by a light being flashed from the mountain behind their house out into the bay. When they looked out into the bay they also saw lights signalling from what was clearly a submarine [exciting stuff for a very small Welsh village]. The brothers were dispatched to the lighthouse keeper along the coast to alert him. Within days statements were taken and the family and other villagers were told to say nothing of what had happened. Intriguing eh! Mum has lot’s of other little gems too numerous to mention here but could elaborate if requested.
Thu Dec 23 16:29:16 2004

Alison Williams from Lytham St Annes, Lancashire
My father lived down there for a few years in the 1930s but moved up to Llithfaen when his sister was born in 1938. We’ve got the book "This valley was ours" and it makes great reading - there’s even some photos of my relations in it. I think my fathers uncle was a manager there at one time and when they first moved down they lived with them in the Managers house until one in "mountain view" (?) became available.
Mon Jan 26 21:44:22 2004

Sioned Roberts from Llithfaen
Eileen M Webb, the daughter of the manager of the Nant at that time has written a book. The death of Mrs Owen’s daughter and many other interesting things are in the book, titled "This Valley Was Ours". It makes great reading for anyone interested in the Nant. My great grandfather was also a manager of one of the quarries down there, my grandmother lived in the Plas as a little girl with the rest of her family.

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